

THE ICE QUEEN



BY

ERNEST INGERSOLL



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"JIM GOT IN AT LEAST ONE GOOD BLOW."—[See page 218.]

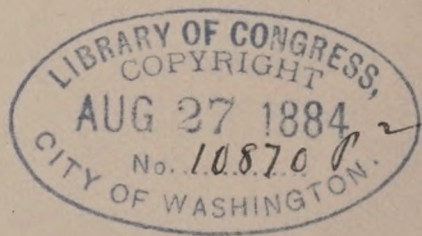
THE ICE QUEEN

By ERNEST INGERSOLL

AUTHOR OF

"FRIENDS WORTH KNOWING," "KNOCKING ROUND THE ROCKIES," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED



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THE ICE QUEEN.

CHAPTER I.

THROWN UPON THEIR OWN RESOURCES.

THE early dusk of a December day was fast changing into darkness as three of the young people with whose adventures this story is concerned trudged briskly homeward.

The day was a bright one, and Aleck, the oldest, who was a skilled workman in the brass foundry, although scarcely eighteen years of age, had given himself a half-holiday in order to take Kate and The Youngster on a long skating expedition down to the lighthouse. Kate was his sister, two years younger than he, and The Youngster was a brother whose twelfth birthday this was.

The little fellow never had had so much fun in one afternoon, he thought, and maintained stoutly that he scarcely felt tired at all. The ice had been in splendid condition, the day calm, but cloudy, so that their eyes had not ached,

and they had been able to go far out upon the solidly frozen surface of the lake.

"How far do you think we have skated to day, Aleck?" asked The Youngster.

"It's four miles from the lower bridge to the lighthouse," spoke up Kate, before Aleck could reply, "and four back. That makes eight miles, to begin with."

"Yes," said Aleck, "and on top of that you must put—let me see—I should think, counting all our twists and turns, fully ten miles more. We were almost abreast of Stony Point when we were farthest out, and they say that's five miles long."

"Altogether, then, we skated about eighteen miles."

"Right, my boy; your arithmetic is your strong point."

"Well, *I* should say his feet were his strong point to-day," Kate exclaimed, in admiration of her brother's hardihood.

"It wasn't a bad day's work for a *girl* I know of, either," remarked Aleck, as he took the key from his pocket and opened the door of their house, which was soon bright with lamplight and a crackling fire of oak and hickory.

The house these three dwelt in was a small cottage in an obscure street of the village, but it was warm and tight. Kate was housekeeper, and The Youngster—whose real name was James, contracted first into Jim, and then into

Jimkin — was man-of-all-work, and maid-of-all-work too, sometimes, when Kate needed his help.

While these two are getting tea, and Aleck is carefully wiping the skates and putting them away where no rust can have a chance at the blades, or mice gnaw the straps, let me tell you a few things about the family.

Jim could remember his father only vaguely, but Kate and Aleck could tell us all about him. His name was Kincaid, and he was a master-builder of houses. He had bought and fitted up the cottage, and had put savings in the bank, though Mrs. Kincaid was sick much of the time, so that money was spent that would have been laid by "for a rainy day" if she had been strong and well.

Unfortunately, the rain came sooner than any one thought for. One day, about five years before the beginning of our little history, papa was brought home hurt by falling from a scaffold at the top of a house. He was not dead, and all thought he would be well again in a few weeks at most; but instead he grew slowly worse, and after a time died.

Then the poor mother, always weak, did the best she could, and Kate tried to help her, while Aleck stopped his school-going, and went to work in the brass foundry. At first, though, he could earn but a little, and Mr. Kincaid's savings slowly melted away until almost nothing was left. Then the tired and desolate mother, never strong, bade her

children that long farewell that seems so terribly hopeless to all of us when we are young, and the three "mitherless bairns" were thrown upon their own resources.

The question arose as to what they should do. Jim was now eight years old, and going to school. Kate had not neglected to do some studying, and a great deal of reading, too, though she had always been so busy; and a few weeks before her mother's death she had begun to study regularly with a lady who lived near, whom Katy repaid by picking various small fruits as they matured in the lady's large garden. Aleck, as I have said, was working steadily, and getting enough wages to keep them all in fair comfort, since they owned the house and enough garden to give them plenty of vegetables. So, after talking the prospect over, they decided to stay in their little house and live together. A letter was written to Uncle Andrew, in Cleveland, who had offered Kate and Jimmy a home, telling him they would try it alone a while before burdening any of their friends.

This decision had been made almost four years before my story opens, and it had not been regretted. They had even saved some money, but the larger part of this had been spent in repairing the house, and in fitting up a new boat for Jim and one of his friends, who thought they knew a way to make a little money in the summer vacation if they had a good boat. This boat had been completed only in

time to prove how good it was, before the winter had closed the river with ice at an unusually early date, and now the pretty craft was safely stored in a warehouse at the schooner-landing, a mile below the town.

All slept very soundly after their skating holiday—even Rex, the great Newfoundland dog, who was a member of the family by no means to be overlooked; but their ears were not stopped so tight that the clangor of the church bells about midnight failed to arouse them with its dreadful alarm of fire. Hastening to an upper window, one glance at the blaze-reddened heavens showed our friends that the group of factories in the southern part of the town was burning, and one of these was the brass foundry where Aleck worked.

Aleck hurried away, and they did not see him until after sunrise, when he came home tired, wet, and soot-blackened. The whole shop had burned to the ground, he reported, and it was only by great risk and exertion that he had been able to rescue his father's precious chest of tools.

"I didn't think," said the young man, as he sat wearily down to Katy's hot coffee, "that my job would be so short when McAbee told me yesterday I could work there 'as long as the foundry lasted.' "

During that day and the next Aleck tried every possible chance of employment in the village, but found nothing;

and by the time evening came he had made up his mind that no regular employment equal to his old place was to be had there for months to come.

There was no doubt about it. The time had arrived when they must avail themselves of Uncle Andrew's kindness, and seek in his hospitable house at least a temporary home.

CHAPTER II.

"THE YOUNGSTER'S" PLAN.

"You see," said Aleck, "though I've about seventy-five dollars ahead, yet when we have bought what we shall need, there will not be more than forty dollars left. Now, if we go to Cleveland in the cars and take our things with us, it'll cost us twenty-five dollars or more, and leave us almost nothing to get started with there."

"S'posin'," said Jimkin the Wise, "s'posin' we don't go in the cars. Cleveland's on the lake, and the lake's all ice; let's skate down to uncle's!"

"Humph!" grunted Aleck.

"Pshaw!" said Kate.

"Didn't we skate eighteen miles yesterday, and couldn't we have gone farther?" persisted Jim, unabashed.

"It's more than a hundred miles to Cleveland. Think you could do that in one day? Besides, how would you know the way?"

"Didn't say I could do it in one day. But couldn't we go ashore and stop at night? That's the way the Hall boys did, who skated up to Detroit last winter."

"I read in the newspaper yesterday," said Kate, "that the lake was frozen uncommonly hard, and was solid ice all the way along the shore as far as the headlands of Ashtabula."

"If we could be sure of that," Aleck admitted, "there might be some use in trying; but one can't be sure. Besides, how could we take along our baggage?"

"Pull it on a sled," said Kate, "the way they do in the arctic regions. Men up there just live on the ice, sleep at night and cook their food and travel all day, and they don't have skates either. Gracious! Who can that be?"

No wonder Katy was astonished, for there came echoing through the house a noise as if somebody was pounding the wall down with a stone maul. Aleck hastened to put a stop to it by opening the door.

He was greeted by the grinning face of a round-headed, chunky lad nearly his own age, named Thucydides Montgomery; but as this was too long a name for the Western people, it had been cut down very early in life to "Tug," which everybody saw at once was the right word, on account of the lad's strength and toughness. The mammas of the village thought him a bad boy, getting their information from the small boys of the public school, whom, in his great fondness for joking, he would sometimes frighten and tease.

Aleck knew him better, and knew how brave and good-

hearted he was. Jim had good cause to be fond of him, for, in behalf of The Youngster, during his first week at school, Tug had soundly thrashed a bullying tyrant; while Kate gratefully remembered various heavy market-baskets he had carried for her, since he lived near by. A closer tie between our little family and their visitor, however, was the fact that, like them, he was an orphan, and, like them, had relatives in Cleveland, whom he had often thought he should like to be with better than staying with his aunt here in Monore.

When Tug had joined the circle gathered before the big fireplace, and had begun to talk about the brass-works, he was promptly hushed by Aleck.

"Put that up now, and attend to me. This urchin here, who has become very cheeky since he began to go to school—"

"And came under my care," Tug interrupted, loftily.

"Yes, no doubt. Well, The Youngster finds we all want to go to Cleveland, but can't afford the railway fare, and so he coolly proposes that we skate there."

"Well, why don't you do it? I'll go with you," said Tug, quietly.

Jim shouted with triumph. Kate laughed, and clapped her hands at the fun of beating her big brother, and Aleck looked as though he thought he was being quizzed.

"Do you mean it?" he asked.

"Of course I do. I want to go down as badly as you do. I haven't any stamps, and the walking, I'm told, isn't good. I prefer to skate."

"Katy says we might drag our luggage on sleds, as they do in the arctic regions; but supposing the ice should break up, or we should come to a big crack?"

"I have read," Kate remarks again, "that they carry boats on their sledges, and pack their goods in the boats, so that they will float if the ice gives way."

"Take my boat!" screamed Jim, eagerly.

"That would call for a big sled."

"Well, didn't you two fellows build a pair of bobs last winter big enough to carry that boat?"

"Doubtful," answered Aleck. But when they brought out the plan of the boat, and then measured the bobs, which were stored in the woodshed, they found them plenty wide, and Tug was sure they were sufficiently strong.

Kate looked at them rather dubiously, and said she had never read of arctic boats mounted on heavy bobs, but that they always seemed in the pictures to have long, light runners under them; but Jim reminded her curtly that "girls didn't know everything," so she kept still, and the planning and talking went on.

Young people who are under no necessity to ask permis-



DISCUSSING THE PLAN.

sion of older persons, and, besides, are pushed by circumstances, decide quickly on a plan which looks forward to adventure. Generally, I fear, they come to grief, and learn some good lessons rather expensively; but sometimes their energy and fearlessness carry them safely through what the caution of old age would have stopped short of trying to perform.

They sat up pretty late discussing the plan, but before Tug went to what he said he "s'posed he must call home," they had determined to try it if the weather held firm.

This was on Friday. They hoped to get away early in the coming week. Then all three went to bed, Jim jubilant, and looking forward to a long frolic; Kate half doubtful whether it was best, but hopeful; Aleck sure that, for himself, he didn't care, hating to put his sister and brother to any risk, yet seeing no better way of resisting poverty; Tug resolute, and bound to stand by his friends, whatever happened. So they slept, and bright and early next morning the quiet preparations began, Tug declining to answer any questions as to how he arranged the matter of his going with his aunt.

CHAPTER III.

FITTING OUT THE "RED ERIK."

THE first thing was to settle upon their preparations.

"What will you want to take, Tug?"

"Precious little, I guess. Besides my clothing, which won't make much of a bundle, I don't own much except my shot-gun, and my weasel-trap, and my odds-and-ends chest, and some hooks and lines. I'm going to sell all the rest of my duds."

"Who'll buy 'em?" asked Jim, doubtfully.

"Never you mind who, infant. 'This stock must be closed out below cost,' as the old-clo' men say. I can put all my baggage in a nail-keg."

"Then that's fixed," Aleck remarked. "Now for *you*, Katy?"

"I think the little trunk that was mamma's, and my hand-bag for brush and comb and such things, will hold all that belongs to me—that is, of my own *own*," she replied, laughing. "Of course, the cooking things, and so on, belong to all of us."

"Well, Jim, your traps and mine will go into the other little chest, I think—at any rate, they must. Now for the general list."

The general outfit was then talked over for more than an hour, when, looking at his watch, Aleck said:

"Now this plan all depends on what luck I have in renting the house. I heard yesterday that Mr. Porter (the owner of the burned factory) would have to leave the hotel, and wanted to find a small furnished house. I am going to see if I can't let ours to him."

So Aleck went off, and Tug and Jim started down to examine the boat, study how much she would hold, and see what would be the best way of mounting her upon the bobs, which they spoke of as "the sledge." They were not back until afternoon, and found that Aleck had just come in, full of success. Mr. Porter would rent the house, and would allow them a closet in which to store all the small goods they wished to leave behind.

"Now, what about the boat?" he asked, as he concluded the story.

"She'll do beautifully. Jim and I think we'd better deck her over from the mast forward, and cover it with painted canvas, so as to make a water-tight place to stow the provisions."

"That's a good idea."

"We thought you'd say so, and so we took exact measurements, and can make a deck here, and fasten it on down there."

"All right; now, how do you think we'd better fasten the boat to the sledge?"

"That's where we want you to help us decide. I don't believe its weight is great enough to hold it firm."

"It's the first thing to be arranged," said Aleck, "and after dinner I guess we'll have to go down to the wharf."

An hour later the three boys were standing beside the boat, gazing first at it and then at the pair of strong bobs they had brought along.

"We must take that coasting-board off the bobs and put in a heavy reach-pole pretty near as long as the boat, that's certain," said Tug.

"And," spoke up Jimmy, "we've got to prop her up on the sledge so she'll stand even, and won't tip."

"Yes, you're both right," Aleck agreed. "The best way is to saw chairs out of two-inch plank which will just fit her bottom, and in which she will sit solidly."

"But," Tug broke in, "that won't hold her firm in the racket she has to go through. She must be bound down to that sledge, and I reckon the best way is to draw bands of stout canvas—big straps would cost too much—over the boat, from one side of the sledge to the other."

They examined and re-examined, but could none of them see any better plan; so they measured, and on their way home bought enough of the heaviest duck to make three bands, each three inches wide.

This transaction brought out a bit of Tug's loyalty. As Aleck took out his purse to pay for the canvas, Tug pushed his hand away and laid a dollar bill on the counter.

"You can just put up your cash," he cried. "This is my affair. If you fellows furnish the boat and sledge and all the rest, I'm going to pay, myself, for what new stuff we have to buy. It's little enough I can do, anyhow."

With this view there was no use of arguing, and Tug had his way that day and during all the rest of the preparation, spending the whole of his savings and the money received from the sale of his books and "contraptions."

While Tug sawed out the chairs, and screwed and spiked them firmly to the sledge that evening, the other two boys worked at the bands, and Katy sewed. They all sat in the kitchen, in order to be where Tug could work, and before they went to bed both tasks were nearly done.

The next day was Sunday.

On Monday the sledge was finished, and the boat was set upon it. Tacking tightly over it the canvas bands, two in front and one towards the stern, the whole affair

proved almost as stiff and firm as though formed of one piece.

“What was the boat’s name?” you may feel like interrupting me to ask.

It had not been christened yet, but when, as they sat by the fire on Sunday evening, Katy read aloud the story of “Red Erik,” they all agreed that that was the name they wanted.

Now the *Red Erik* was fitted to carry one mast, which passed through a hole in the forward thwart, and was stepped into a block underneath. The sail carried by this mast was a square sail of pretty good size, supported by a gaff at the top and a boom at the bottom. When it was not in use it was rolled around the mast, the gaff and boom being laid lengthwise along with it; and by wrapping the sheet around, the whole was lashed into a bundle, which lay very snugly upon the thwarts under one gunwale, where a couple of leather gaskets were buckled about it to keep it from sliding. There was also a jib-sail.

While they were overhauling this gear, the question of what they were to do for a tent came up, and Katy asked whether the sails could not be made useful for that purpose.

Certainly, the mainsail was large enough to form a very decent shelter when stretched over a low ridge-pole, but it

needed loops of rope at the ends in order to be pegged to the ground and thus held in place.

"But there ain't any ground, and you can't drive wooden pegs into ice," objected Katy, at this point of the planning.

"Then," said Aleck, "we shall have to get half a dozen iron pegs, and I have some railway spikes that will be just the thing."

"That's so," said Tug. "Take 'em along. Now, the next thing is poles. The gaff will do for one, but the other one we'll have to make, because we want to use the boom for a ridge-pole."

"Then I'll tell you how we'll fix it," Aleck explained. "We'll put an eye-bolt in the far end of the boom, and call that the front end of the tent. We'll make a front upright post out of hickory, and have the lower end of it shod with iron, so as to stick in the ice—"

"Hold up! I've a better idea than that even," Tug exclaimed. "I suppose you want to save carrying any more timber than you can help. Well, let's cut off the handle of the boat-hook—that's hickory—until it is the right length, and its iron point will stick in the ice, or the ground (if we set her up ashore) first-rate. Then we'll go to the blacksmith, and have a cap made with a spike in it to go through the eye in the end of the boom. When we want to use the boat-hook we can take the cap off."

“That’s a good way ; but how about the gaff ?”

“Set a short spike in the far end to stick in the ice, and let the ridge-pole rest in the jaws of the gaff ; the canvas will hold her steady.”

“Yes, I suppose so. You’re an inventor, Tug. Go down to-morrow and get the irons made.”

Meanwhile, as I said, loops were sewed on the sail, and it was thus arranged to serve as a tent. It had a queer shape when set up in the yard on trial, for the sail was broader at one end than the other, though it did very well indeed. An end piece was lacking ; but this was supplied by putting on tapes so as to tie the broad foot of the jib to one edge of the rear of the tent, while the sharp top end was folded around on the outside and tied to one of the side pegs. For the front they could do no better than hang up a shawl or something of that kind, if needed, since they decided that a few yards square of spare canvas which they had must be kept for a carpet upon the ice floor.

This done, there remained to screw into the forward end of the sledge two eye-bolts, to which the ropes were to be attached for dragging the boat. Each of these ropes was about twelve feet long, and had at one end an iron hook, so as to be put on and taken off very quickly. Three of them were prepared, but, as you will see, it was rare that more than two were ever in use at once on the march. They

could easily be hooked together into one long line, however; two of them would serve as end-stays when the tent was set up; and they were often of the greatest importance to the young adventurers, in enabling them to overcome difficulties, or to extricate themselves from some perplexing or dangerous situation.

All these arrangements, by hard work, were finished on Tuesday evening, the very last task being the making of a box with double-hinged covers, which should fit snugly under the stern-thwart. This was to be the kitchen chest or mess kit, holding the cooking utensils and dishes. When its two covers were spread out and propped up it formed a low table.

CHAPTER IV.

MAKING A START.

KATY, meanwhile, had been looking after clothing and provisions. On Tuesday evening, when Tug came in after tea, she was ready to read to him a full list, as follows:

BOAT OUTFIT.—Sailing and rowing gear complete; one piece of spare canvas three yards square; one oil lantern and a gallon of oil; one compass; a locker under the stroke-thwart, containing calking-iron, oakum, putty, copper nails, gimlet, screw-driver, screws, sail needle, thread, wax, etc.

CAMP OUTFIT.—Tent (*made out of the sails*), pegs, poles, etc.; one axe; one hatchet; one small handsaw; one shovel; one clothes-line; one mess chest, containing the fewest possible dishes, tin cups, knives, forks, etc., also a skillet, a coffee-pot, etc.; one iron kettle; one covered copper pail.

PERSONAL BAGGAGE.—One trunk for Aleck's and Jim's clothing; one trunk for Katy's clothing; Tug's box (*clothing, and what he says are "contraptions"*); small valise for Katy's toilet necessities and other small articles.

BEDDING (*tied up in close rolls*).—For Aleck, three blankets and a thick quilt.

For Jim, the same.

For Tug, three blankets and a piece of old sail-cloth.

For Katy, a buffalo-robe trimmed square, two flannel sheets, three blankets, and a heavy shawl.

Thick woollen nightcaps or hoods for all.

FOOD (*enough to last two weeks, it is supposed, and consisting chiefly of the first seven articles named*).—Corn-meal, coffee, sugar, crackers, dried beef, bacon, and ham; also small quantities of potatoes, beans, dried corn, tea, chocolate, maple sugar, buckwheat flour, and condiments. (Katy did not count the luxuries of the first day's evening meal.)

All these supplies, as far as possible, were put into bags made of strong cloth or of heavy paper, or into wooden boxes, and then were stowed under the forward deck. To carry them and the rest of the luggage down to the wharf, a box was fastened upon Jim's hand-sled, and several trips were made.

At last Wednesday afternoon came, and the preparations for the adventurous journey were complete. All the morning had been spent by Tug and Jim in packing away goods in the boat, while Aleck and Kate finished the home-leaving, bringing down a final sled-load with them about two o'clock. Besides this, Katy's arms were full of "suspicious-

looking" bundles, as Tug noticed, the contents of which she refused to let any one know before night.

The boat lay hidden underneath the warehouse wharf, and of the few who knew of their intentions nobody seemed to have let out the secret ; moreover, the day was unusually cold and somewhat windy, so that few skaters were out, at least, so far down the river. Thus they were not annoyed by inquisitive visitors. Ten minutes after Aleck and Kate arrived the final package had been stowed, the mantle of canvas spread over, the oars and rolled-up tent laid on top, and Tug announced everything ready.

"Then let's be off," said Aleck, as he buckled the last strap of his left skate, and stood up.

"Not till you give the word of command, Captain."

"Captain !" echoed Jim, standing very straight.

"Captain !" Kate caught up the word, and made a funny girlish imitation of an officer's salute. "Not till you give the order, sir !"

"Oho !" laughed Aleck. "That's election by acclamation, I should say ! All right ; only, if I'm to be Captain, remember you must do as I say at once, and save any arguing about it until afterwards. When you get tired you can vote me out as you voted me in. Will you agree ?"

"Yes—agreed !" cried all three.

"Then my first order is 'Forward !'" and so saying he



“A MOMENT LATER THEY WERE OFF.”

seized a drag-rope and sent the sledge-boat spinning out upon the smooth ice far from under the shadow of the wharf, showing how easily it could be run in spite of its weight, which was not less than five hundred pounds.

A moment later they were off on the first strokes of a trip that proved far more eventful than any of them anticipated—Aleck with the drag-rope, Tug by his side, Jim pulling his sled, Rex leaping and barking, and Kate bringing up the rear with her hands on the stern-rail of the boat. Two or three boys and men called after them, and one followed a little way, but he was sent back with short answers, and in a few moments the church spires, the big, bell-crowned cupola of the High School, and the lofty spans of the railway bridge had been left far behind. Not much was said, for even heedless Jim felt that this was a serious undertaking, and the pleasant scenes they had known so long might never be revisited.

CHAPTER V.

COMFORT IN A LOG CABIN.

THE pain of this farewell did not long cloud their faces. Tug and Jim had had no luncheon, and were growing anxious for something to eat. Down at the mouth of the river stood a small cabin, often occupied in early spring by the sportsmen who went for a day's duck-shooting in the great marshes that spread right and left on both sides of the stream. It was buried among big cottonwood and sycamore trees, and was pretty snug. Besides, it had a fireplace, into which somebody had stuck a long iron bolt pulled out of some bit of wreckage on the beach, and which served as a great convenience in the rude cooking of the sportsmen.

At this cabin our party proposed to spend the first night. They thought it would be an easy letting down from sleeping in their beds at home to the tenting they feared they might have to do afterwards. Katy had been the one to suggest this, and Tug had earnestly supported the idea.

"Things don't seem so hard when they come upon you

gradually, as the kind-hearted man said when he cut off his dog's tail a little piece at a time, so the pup wouldn't mind it."

The sun was just disappearing straight up the river behind them as the cabin came in sight; and before its half-closed door

"'All *bloody* lay the untrodden snow,'"

as Kate exclaimed, misquoting her "Hohenlinden" to suit the red glow of the rich evening light.

"Hurrah for supper!" screamed Jim; and with an extra spurt they swung the boat up to the bank.

A little sweeping with a broom made of an alder branch cleared the cabin of the snow that had blown into the cracks and fallen down the mud-and-stone chimney. This done, Aleck called to them to listen to his first orders, which he had written down in a note-book, and now read as follows:

"CAPTAIN'S ORDER No. 1.—Any order given by the Captain must be obeyed by the person to whom it is addressed, unless his reason for not doing so will not keep till camping-time; merely *not liking* the duty is no excuse.

"CAPTAIN'S ORDER No. 2.—The Captain will say when and where camp shall be made, and immediately upon stopping to camp the duties of each person shall be taken up

as follows: the Captain shall secure the boat, get out the tent, and proceed to set it up; Tug shall take the axe and get fuel for the fire; Kate shall see to the building of the fire and the preparation of food; Jim shall help Kate, particularly in carrying articles needed, and in getting water; and all, when these special duties are finished, shall report to the Captain for further duty.

“CAPTAIN’S ORDER No. 3.—Any complaints or suggestions must be made in council, which will commence after camp work is completed and supper is over, and not before.”

“There,” said Aleck, “do you agree to that?”

“Yes—agreed!” shouted three voices in chorus.

“Then pitch in, all of you; you know your work.”

At this Tug seized the axe, Aleck and Jim went to the sledge, and Katy began to kindle a little blaze on the hearth with some bits of dry wood she found lying about, so that when Tug had brought an armful of sticks, a good fire was quickly crackling. Then the iron pot, full of water, was hung upon the old spike, where the blaze began curling around its three little black feet in a most loving way.

“Jimkin,” called the girl to her brother, who was gazing with delight at the bright fire, “Jimkin, bring me all those paper packages at the stern of the boat, and be careful of the white one—it’s eggs.”

"I guess there won't be much tent to set up to-night, Aleck," he remarked, as he found the Captain, who had hauled the sledge well up on the bank and tied it securely to a tree, now busy in dragging out the sail.

"No," was the reply, "but the canvas'll come handy. Tell Tug I say he'd better get a big heap of wood together, for we're going to have a cold night. The wind has turned to the north, and is rising."

When he had taken the canvas up to the cabin, he called Jim to help him, and they brought in the mess chest, the rolls of bedding, and the piece of spare canvas which had covered the prow. Then, telling Jim to take the little sled that had been dragged behind the boat, and haul to the door the wood Tug had cut among the trees not far away, Aleck seized the shovel and began heaping snow against the northern side of the house, where there were many cracks between the lower logs. But his hard work to shut them up in this way seemed to be in vain, for the wind, which was blowing harder and harder every minute, whisked the snow away about as fast as he was able to pile it up. Kate, stepping out to see what he was about, came to his rescue with a happy thought.

"I read in Dr. Kane's book of arctic travels, that when they make houses of snow they throw water on them, which freezes, and holds them firm and tight. Couldn't you do that here? It's cold enough to freeze anything."

Aleck thought he might, and bidding Kate go back to her fireside, he called the other boys to help him; then, while Jim stuffed the cracks with snow, Aleck and Tug alternately brought water from a hole cut in the river ice, and dashed it against the chinking. Some of the water splashed through, and a good deal was tossed back in their faces and benumbed their hands, so that it was hard, cold work; but before long a crust had formed over the snow-stuffed cracks, and Katy came to the door to say that she couldn't feel a draught anywhere. The roof was pretty good, and when, tired and hungry, but warm with their exercise (except as to their toes and fingers), the three lads went in and shut the door, they found their quarters very snug, and didn't mind how loud the gale howled among the trees outside. Rex, especially, seemed to enjoy it, curling down at the corner of the fireplace as though very much at home.

Meanwhile Katy bustled about, setting out plates, knives, and forks on the top of the mess chest, which she had covered with the clean white paper in which her packages had been wrapped. She had put eight eggs to boil in the kettle, which were now done, and were carefully fished out, while the coffee-pot was bubbling on the coals, and letting fragrant jets of steam escape from under the loosely fitting cover. A cut loaf of bread lay on the table, and beside it a tumbler of currant jelly, "as sure as I am a Dutchman"



SUPPER IN THE LOG CABIN.

—which was Tug's favorite way of putting a truth very strongly indeed, though he wasn't that kind of a man at all. The eagerness to taste this sweetmeat brought out the melancholy fact that by some accident there was only one spoon in the whole kit.

"We'll fix that all right this evening," Aleck remarked. "I'll whittle wooden ones out of sycamore."

"Shall I broil some mutton-chops, or will you save those for breakfast?"

"Broil 'em now," cried Jim.

"Hold your opinion, Youngster, till your elders are heard," was Tug's rejoinder. "I vote we save 'em."

"So do I."

"And I."

"Done," says Captain Aleck. "Give us the chops for breakfast, Miss Housekeeper."

"Then supper's all ready," she said, and took her seat on a stick of wood, pouring and passing the coffee, while the eggs and the bread and butter went round. By the time the meal was finished it had become dark, but this did not matter, since there was no need to go out of doors.

"How shall I wash the dishes?" asked Katy, with a comical grin, as she rose from the table. "I couldn't bring a big pan."

"Well," suggested Aleck, "you can clean out your ket-

tle, refill it with water—Jim, there's business for you!—and then wash them in that."

"That's a matter never bothered me much when *I* was camping," added Tug, dryly. "I just scrubbed the plates with a wisp of grass, and cleaned the knives and forks by jabbing 'em into the ground a few times."

While the dishes were washing Aleck opened the tent bundle, and laid the mast across two pegs that somebody had driven into the north wall of the room just under the ceiling beams, perhaps to hang fishing-poles on. Then, with Tug's aid, he tied to the mast the inner hem of the sail-cloth, which thus hung loosely against the wall, like a big curtain, shutting out every draught.

"That's splendid!" cried Katy, watching them from the end of the room where the fire was.

"So is *this*!" came a voice from overhead, making them all look up in surprise.

It was Jim, who, unnoticed by any one, had clambered into the loft, which had been floored over about two thirds of the room, and who was now thrusting his red face down through the open part.

"What do you think I've found?"

"Give it up. I knew of a man who died after asking conundrums all his life," answered Tug, gravely, "and I've fought shy of 'em since."

"Tell us at once, Jimkin," called out Aleck.

"*Straw!*" shouted Jim.

"Pshaw!" was the next rejoinder heard.

"No rhymes, Katy," Aleck admonished. "Is it clean, Youngster?"

"Cleaner than he is, I should say, by his face," said Tug, and with some reason, for the loft was dusty.

"Don't know; you can see for yourself," and down came a great yellow armful.

It was pounced upon, and, proving dry and fresh, the delighted Jim was ordered to send down all he could find, which was laid on the floor, not far from the fire, and covered with the spare canvas. This made a soft sort of mattress, upon which each one could spread his blankets, and sleep with great comfort, since there was plenty for all.

"Sha'n't have so good a bed as this another night," groaned Aleck.

"Can't tell—maybe better!" said the cheerful Tug.

The warmest place was set apart for Katy, and Aleck made a small screen, covered with a newspaper curtain, which separated her from the other three, who were to sleep side by side. These preparations made, the fire was heaped high with fresh wood, and then the little quartet took their ease, lounging on the springy straw before it,

and indulging in a quiet talk over the busy day just finished, or what they were likely to meet on the morrow.

Aleck said something about being able to travel by compass in case they were caught in a snow-storm, which was what he dreaded the most, when Jim asked him to explain the compass to him, leaving Katy's side and going over to where his big brother was stretched out at the other corner of the fireplace. The girl, thus deserted, went to the valise in which she kept her small articles, and came back with a book.

CHAPTER VI.

NORSE TALES.

"WHAT are you reading?" asked Tug, who was the last boy in the world to be interested in a book, unless it was one about animals, but who had nothing else to do just then.

"A book of old stories."

"What about?—adventures, and things of that sort?"

"Partly. Some of them are fairy stories—about queer little people, and animals that talk, and heavenly beings that help lost children, and people that have hard times."

"Why, those are the very fellows we want to see. Let's hear about 'em—mebbe we can give 'em a job."

"Well, if you would like it, I'll read you this story I've just begun," said Katy, good-naturedly.

"Much obliged. I think that would be tip-top."

So Katy read to him, as he lounged on the straw and gazed into the bright fire, an old myth-story of the North Wind. How, away in a far corner of Norway, there once lived a widow with one son. It was midwinter, and she was weak, so the lad was obliged to go to the "safe" (or

cellar dug near the house, where the food was kept) to bring the materials for the morning meal. The first time he went, and the second, and again, at the third attempt, the fierce North Wind blew the food out of his hands. These three losses vexed the lad greatly, and he resolved to go to the North Wind and demand the food back. After long travelling he found the home of the giant, far towards the pole, and made his demand. The North Wind heard him, and gave him a cloth which would serve all the finest dishes in the world whenever the boy chose to spread it and call for them. On his way home he stopped at a tavern for the night, and, spreading his cloth, had a feast. The landlady was astonished, as well she might be, and thinking what a useful thing such a tablecloth would be in a hotel, she stole it while the lad was asleep, and put in its place one that looked like it, but which had no secret power.

The lad, not suspecting the change, went home, and boasted gleefully to his mother of what he had brought. But when he tried it, of course the false cloth could do nothing, and the old lady both laughed at him and scolded him. Vexed again, the lad hastened back, and accused the North Wind of fraud. So the giant gave him a ram which would coin golden ducats when commanded. Stopping at the tavern as before, the landlord exchanged this remarkable animal for one from his own common flock, and the

lad found himself fooled a second time. Going back a third time, he told the story to the North Wind, who gave the angry lad a stout stick which, when it had been told to "lay on," would never cease striking till the lad bade it to stop.

At the tavern, the landlord, thinking there was some useful enchantment in the stick, tried to steal it also, but the boy was wide awake. He shouted, "Lay on," and the landlord found himself being clubbed till he was nearly dead, and gave back all that he had taken. Then the boy went home, and he and his mother lived rich and happy ever afterwards.

Tug's vigorous applause aroused the attention of the other two, who may have been listening a little, and Aleck asked what the book was.

"Dr. Dasent's 'Norse Tales,'" Katy replied.

"Who or what is 'Norse'?" Jim inquired.

This was a question Tug had been wanting to ask too, but had felt ashamed to expose his ignorance—one of the few things not really mean which a boy has a right to be ashamed of.

"The Norse people," Katy said, "are the people of Scandinavia (or the *Northmen*, as they were called in ancient times), and these stories are those that old people have told their children in Norway and Sweden for—oh! for

hundreds of years. Many are about animals, and others—”

“Give us one about an animal,” Tug interrupted.

“Very well, here’s one that tells why the bear has so short a tail:

“One day the Bear met the Fox, who came slinking along with a string of fish he had stolen.

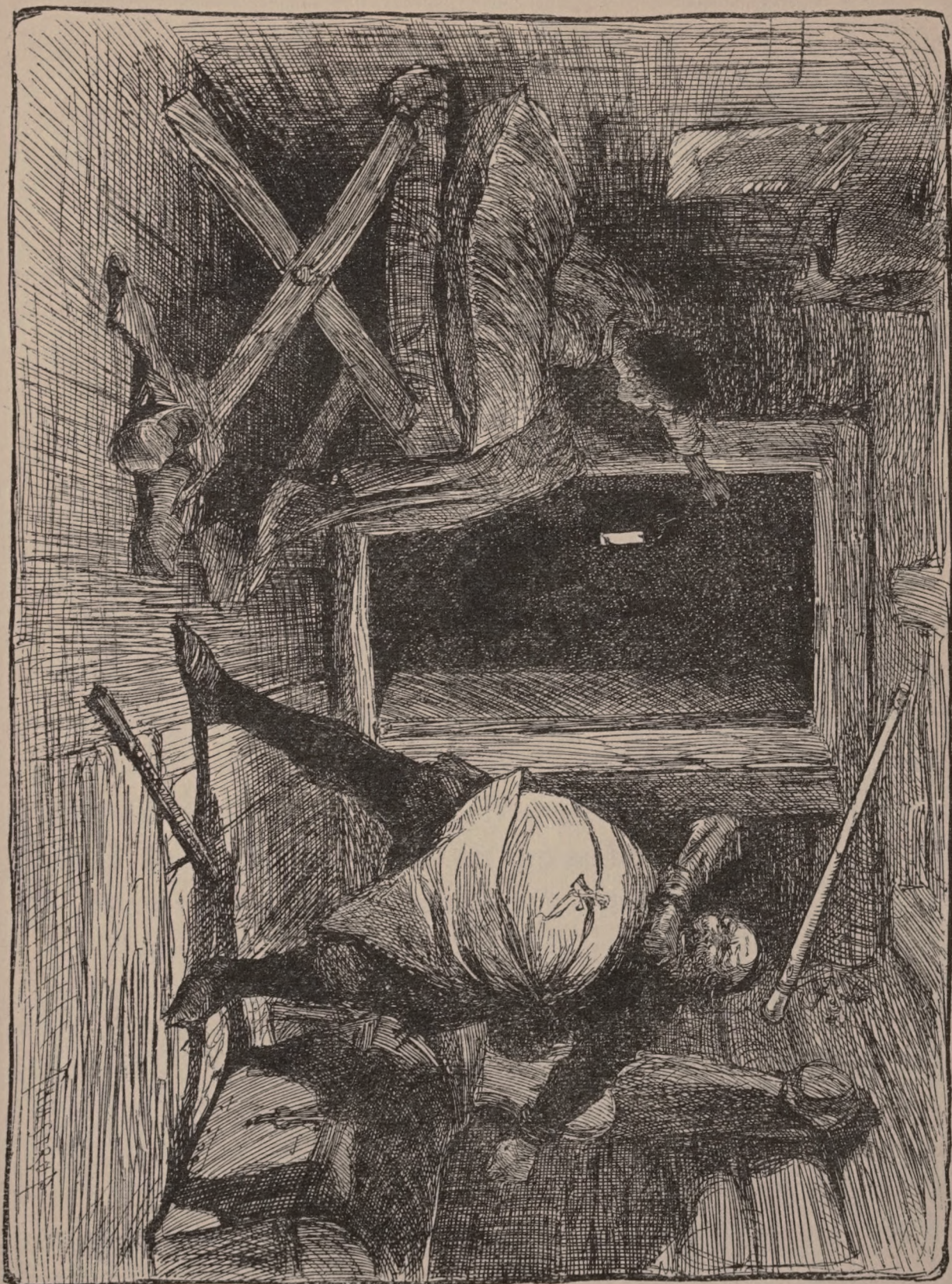
“‘Whence did you get these?’ asked the Bear.

“‘Oh, my Lord Bruin, I’ve been out fishing, and caught them,’ said the Fox.

“So the Bear had a mind to learn to fish too, and bade the Fox tell him how he was to set about it.

“‘Oh, it’s an easy craft for you,’ said the Fox, ‘and one soon learned. You’ve only to go upon the ice, and cut a hole, and stick your tail down into it; and so you must go on holding it there as long as you can. You’re not to mind if your tail smarts a little; that’s when the fish bite. The longer you hold it, the more fish you’ll get; and then, all at once, out with it, with a cross pull sideways, and with a strong pull too.’

“Yes; the Bear did as the Fox said, and held his tail a long, long time down in the hole, until it was fast frozen in. Then he pulled it out with a cross pull, and it snapped short off. That’s why Bruin goes about with a stumpy tail to this day.”



When this short and stirring tale of a tail had been concluded, the Captain's voice was heard.

"Now for bed!" he ordered, winding up his watch, whose golden hands pointed to nine o'clock.

Partially undressing, they tucked themselves into their quilts and blankets on the crackling straw, and silence followed. Sleep was slow to close the eyes of the younger ones, who were kept awake by their strange situation; and Rex, lying at Katy's feet, frequently raised his head as the roaring wind shrieked through the tall trees outside, or rattled a loose board in the roof with a strange noise.

The first one to awake next morning was Aleck, who looked at his watch by the glimmer of the coals, and was surprised to find it after eight o'clock, though only a gray light came through the little window of the cabin. Creeping out, he raked the embers together, laid on some fresh wood, and hung the kettle on the spike. Then he called his companions, who sat up and rubbed their eyes.

"Katy, you lie still till the boys go off. We'll bring you some water, and then you can have the house to yourself for a while. Get out of this, you fellows! Jim, bring a pail of water for the cook. Tug, you and I will go and see how the boat has stood the night."

Two minutes later they were gone. After Jim had brought the fresh water (he was slow about it, because he

had to rechop the well-hole) the girl sprang up to make herself neat, and was busy at breakfast when the boys pounded the door like a battering-ram with the axe-handle, "so as surely to be heard," and begged to know if they might come in.

"Good-morning!" she greeted them. "How is the weather?"

"Weather!" exclaimed Tug, spreading his hands before the fire, and working his ears out from underneath a huge red comforter just as I have seen a turtle slowly push his head beyond the folded skin of his neck. "Weather! It's the roughest day I ever saw. I don't believe old Zach himself could skate a rod against that wind."

(Zach was a six-foot-three lumberman in Monore, who was noted for his great strength.)

"Then how can we go on?" asked Katy, dropping eggshells into the coffee-pot.

"I'm afraid we can't," Aleck said, soberly; "at least, until this gale goes down. It is very, very cold, and I'm sure we are much better off here. Don't you all think so?"

"*You bet!*" shouted Tug.

"*You bet!*" Jim echoed.

"Then I must worry about dinner," said Katy, with a pretended groan which made them all laugh.

At breakfast came the promised chops. Then, while

Katy and Jim set the cabin into neat shape, the older lads went after more wood, and, having done this, walked out to the neighboring marsh and cut great armfuls of wild rice and rushes, with which to make their straw beds thicker and softer. This, and other things, took up the morning, and then all came in to help and hinder Katy while she got dinner.

When it had been set out they found half a boiled ham, potatoes, some fried onions ("arctic voyagers always need to eat onions to prevent scurvy, you know," Katy explained), and even bread and butter; but the last item represented almost the end of their only loaf.

In the afternoon the wind moderated, the clouds that had made it so dark in the morning cleared away, and the sun came out. Under the shelter of the long wharf and break-water they walked out on the ice to the lighthouse, where they had been so often in midsummer; but now it was shut up, for there would be no use in burning a signal-light on the lake after the cold weather of the fall had put a stop to navigation, until spring recalled the idle vessels.

Supper was simple, but they had lots of fun over it, and then all set at work to help Aleck make straps of canvas to put over the shoulder and across the breast when they were hauling on the drag-rope. This contrivance saved chafing, and gave a better pull. Jim had pooh-poohed the taking

of a sail-needle and some waxed twine along as unnecessary, but Aleck had persisted; and here was its service the very first day. Before the trip was through with, everybody wanted a hundred little articles they did not possess, worse than they would have missed this sail-needle had it not been brought.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FIRST DAY ON THE LAKE.

No howling gale disturbed their rest that night, and on the next morning, which was Friday, the third day out, breakfast had been disposed of long before the hour of rising on the previous day. What had they for breakfast? Hot and tender buckwheat cakes, with syrup made from maple sugar melted in a tin cup. The boiled ham and some crackers were put where they could be got at easily for luncheon.

The stowing of the loose goods in the boat took no longer than Katy required to get the mess kit packed after breakfast. As the day was fine, and the ice, as far as they could see to the southward, whither their course lay, was smooth and free from snow, the sled was loaded with cut wood and rushes, ready for making a fire, and Jim was appointed to drag it.

As they were leaving the cabin, after a last look to see that nothing had been forgotten, Katy spoke up:

“Why can’t we take along some of this nice straw? It doesn’t weigh anything to speak of.”

"Oh, we can't," says Jim, crossly. "Girls are always trying to do things they know nothing about."

"May's well begin to rough it now as any time; can't expect a cabin and a straw mattress every night," was Tug's somewhat gruff remark as he went to the sledge.

"But," the girl persisted, rather piqued when she saw how her suggestion had been received, "it might be very nice to spread it on the floor of the tent. Seems to me you might take it."

She was talking to Aleck now, who, she knew by his face, opposed the plan; but he, seeing how much in earnest she was, went back, gathered up a big armful of the cleanest straw, and heaped it in the stern of the boat, while she brought a second bundle.

This matter settled, Aleck and Tug put their heads through the new harness, and were soon rushing along at a stirring pace, while Katy skated behind, holding on to the stern of the boat to steady it; Jim followed with his sled, and Rex galloped here and there as suited him.

The ice for miles together had been swept clean by the wind, and was like a vast, glaring sheet of plate-glass. Most of it was a deep, brilliant green. Here and there would be stretches of milky ice, and now and then great rounded patches would suddenly meet them, which were black or deep brown, and at first frightened them by making them

believe a patch of open water suddenly yawned in their path. But, when they examined closely, they could see that this black ice was two or three feet thick, like all the rest on the open lake.

They were never at any time more than a mile or so from the edge of the great marshes which bordered the low margin of the lake, and at noon they knew they had skated twelve miles, by reaching a certain island standing just in front of the reedy shallows.

Thither they gladly turned for luncheon; skates were unbuckled, a big fire was built, the snow was cleared away, and the spare canvas spread down to sit upon, while Katy prepared to warm up the extra supply of coffee she had made in the morning for this purpose.

Not much talking had been done on the march; breath was too badly needed to be wasted in that way; but now "tongues were loosed," and a rattling conversation kept time with the crackle of the dead sticks on the fire.

"Captain," said Tug, "have you noticed how that ridge in the ice bends just ahead, and seems to stand across our course?"

"Yes, I have, and I fear it will be troublesome to cross. Jimkin, you're nimble; climb that cottonwood, and tell us what you can see."

"All right," said Jim, and was quickly in the tree-top.

"It looks like a rough, broken ridge, stretching clear to shore. I guess we'll have to climb over it. I can't see any break."

"Where do you think is the easiest place?"

"About straight ahead, where you see that highest point. Right beside it is a kind o' low spot, I think."

"Well, then," said the Captain, "we'll aim for that. Hurry up your lunch, Katy, and let's be off."

Half an hour later they arrived at the bad place.

"It must be a *hummock*," said Katy, "such as I have read about in Dr. Kane's book—only not so large, I suppose. He says that the ice-sheet, or floe, gets cracked and separated a little; then the two floes will come together again with such force that they lap over one another, or else grind together, and burst up edgewise along the seam."

"That's just the way this is; but, hummock or no hummock, it must be crossed," said Aleck.

"Mebbe I could find a better place," suggested Jim, "if I should go along a little way."

"Well, try it, Youngster. And, Tug, suppose you take a scout in the other direction."

Tug went off, but soon returned, reporting a worse instead of better appearance, and Aleck, who had climbed over, came back to say that the ridge was about twenty-five yards wide.

"How does it look?" asked Katy.

"Why, it looks as though a lot of big cakes of ice had been piled up on edge, and then frozen into that rough shape, or lack of shape. I should say the ridge is ten feet high in the middle, and on the other side it is a straight jump down for about six feet. But it's worse everywhere else. We must take our skates off the first thing."

This done, they stood up, ready to drag the boat as near to the hummock as possible. But it was hard pulling, for the slope was pretty steep and rough.

"Where's that Jim, I wonder?" cried Aleck. "I'll teach The Youngster not to run off the minute any work is to be done. *Jim!*"

But no boy answered the call, nor several others. Tug stood up on the boat, and Katy climbed to a high point of ice, but neither could see anything. Then they all became alarmed, fearing he might have fallen into one of those holes that here and there are found in the thickest ice, and always stay open. It is an easy matter to skate into one, but a very hard one to get out again. It was the thought of this that made Katy run in the direction whither Jim had started, but her brother called her back.

"Wait, Katy. We'll put on our skates. Probably The Youngster's hiding, and I'll box his ears when I catch him. This is no time for fooling."

With quick, nervous fingers they fastened their straps, and then rushed down along the foot of the hummock as though on a race, Tug carrying one of the drag-ropes. The tracks could be followed easily enough until they left the good ice and turned in towards the hummock, where they came to an end, which looked as though Jim might have taken off his skates. Here the boys hallooed, then climbed to the top of a great, upturned table of blue ice, and called again. But the most complete silence followed their words—such a silence as can never be known on land among the creaking trees or rustling grass; an absolute, painful stillness. Not even an echo came back.

At this they were puzzled and frightened, and Katy wanted to cry, but fought back her tears. They descended, and went slowly onward, now and then getting upon elevated points, and calling. At last they stopped, utterly at their wits' end where or how to search next, and Katy's tears rolled down her cheeks unchecked.

"Cheer up, Sis," said Aleck, and took her hand in his as they skated slowly onward; "cheer up! we'll try again on that big block ahead."

This block overlooked a broader part of the hummock, and wasn't far from land. They struggled over the jagged border, and hoisted Katy upon it to see what she could see.

"Nothing," was her report; "nothing but ice, and ice,

and ice, and a gray edge of marsh. Oh, Jim! Jim! where are you?"

"Here—help me out."

Each looked at the other in amazement, for the voice, though faint, seemed right beside them.

"Here, down between the cakes—help me out."

The words came distinctly, and gave them a clew. Katy peeped over the farther edge of the block, and there she saw the little fellow's face peering up at her out of the greenish light of a sort of pit into which he had fallen. Two great cakes of ice had been thrown up side by side, leaving a space about two feet wide and ten feet deep between them. The blowing snow that filled most of the crevices of the hummock had here formed a bridge, which had let Jim through when he stepped upon it, never suspecting the chasm it concealed.

"Hurt?" asked Tug.

"Not a bit, but pretty well scared. I thought you fellows were never coming. I've been in here two hours."

"Two hours! Oho, that's good! Twenty minutes would about fill the bill. You ain't tired so quick of a warm, snug place like that, are you?"

"Just you try it, and see how you like its snugness. Drop me an end of that rope, will you?"

"Give him the rope's end, Tug; he deserves it in an-

other way, but we haven't time to-day. Now, then—yo-heave-o!" and up came the lost member, not much the worse for his adventure.

Then began the difficult work of crossing the hummock. In front of the boat lay a steep slope of glassy ice, and beyond and above that a series of steps and jagged points, forming about such a plateau as a big heap of building-stone would make, only here the fragments were larger.

All four, going to the top of the first slope, pulled the boat upward until the forward runners were just balanced on the crest. Then a hook on one of the ropes came loose; four young people fell sprawling; and the boat dropped backward with a rush to the very bottom of the ridge, where it upset.

"Now," said Aleck, when they had set the boat upright again, and found nothing broken; "now let us take out all the loose stuff, and so lighten her as much as we can."

This was done.

"We three fellows," was the Captain's next order, "will drag her up again, and Katy must go behind with the boat-hook, and stick it into the ice behind the boat, to hold it, like a chock-block under a wagon wheel, whenever it shows any signs of slipping back. Now, everybody be careful."

The steady pulling, with Katy's pushing and guiding, got

the front runners safely over the edge of the sloping side, and gave them a chance to rest. But when they tried to move it forward enough to bring the stern up, the boat couldn't be budged, because the ice in front was so full of ruts and ridges.

CHAPTER VIII.

JIM'S REBELLION.

"I TELL you what, boys," Tug cried, after a great effort, "there's no use trying any more till we have smoothed a road, and I think, Captain, you'd better set all hands at that."

"I'm afraid that is so. Jim, please go back and get the axe, the hatchet, and the shovel. Now, while Tug and I dig at this road, you and Jim, Katy, can bring some of the freight up here, or perhaps take it clear across, and so save time. The small sled will help you."

It was tedious labor all around, and the wind began to blow in a way they would have thought very cold had they not been so warm and busy with work. As fast as a rod or two of road was cleared, the four took hold and dragged the boat ahead. These slow advances used up so much time that when the plateau had been crossed, the sun, peering through dark clouds, was almost level with the horizon. It now remained to get down the sudden pitch and rough slope on the farther side. But this was a task of no small importance, and Aleck called a council on the subject.



CROSSING THE HUMMOCK.

“My lambs,” he began (the funny word took the edge off the unfortunate look of affairs, as it was intended to do)—“my lambs, it is growing late, and it’s doubtful if we can get this big boat down that pair of stairs before dark. Don’t you think I’d better order Jim and Katy to pack up the small sled with tent and bedding and kitchen-stuff?”

“’Twon’t hold it all!” interrupted Jim.

“Then, Youngster, you can come back after the bedding. Take the cooking things first, and you and Katy go back to the island where we lunched, and make a fire. Tug and I—eh, Tug?—will stay here and chop away till dark, and then we’ll go back to camp with you when you come after the blankets, and help you carry the tent.”

“Are you going to leave the boat here all night?” asked Jim, in alarm.

“Why, of course; what’ll harm it? Now be off, and make a big fire.”

So the younger ones departed, and by and by Jim returned for a second load. He found the two older boys cutting a sloping path through the little ice bluff on the farther side of the hummock, and pretty tired of it. They were not yet done—the shovel not being of much service in working the hard blue ice—but it was now getting too dark to do more, so they piled the snug bundles of blankets into Jim’s sled box, and gave him the rope, while Tug and Aleck put

their shoulders under opposite ends of the tent roll. Then together they all skated away through the thickening windy twilight, and over the ashy-gray plain of ice, towards where Katy's fire glowed like a red spark on the distant shore.

It was a weary but not at all disheartened party that lounged in the open door of the tent that night, while a big fire blazed in front, and supper was cooking. This was the first time the sail had been spread as a tent, and it answered the purpose nicely, giving plenty of room. The straw Katy had been so anxious about had to be left in the boat, so that they got no good of it. Jim chaffed his sister a good deal about this, and Tug rather encouraged him, thinking it was a fair chance for fun at Katy's expense; but when he saw that Katy really was feeling badly, not at Jim's teasing words, but for fear she had made the boys useless trouble, Aleck came to the rescue. Seizing The Youngster by the shoulder, he spun him round like a teetotum, and was going to box his ears, when Katy cried out, "Oh, don't!" and saved that young gentleman's skin for the present.

"Then I'll punish you in another way. Take your knife, go over there to the marsh"—it was perhaps a hundred yards away—"and cut as many rushes as you can carry."

The Youngster never moved.

"I don't want the rushes," said Katy, trying to keep the peace, but her brother paid no heed.

"Did you hear what I said?" he asked again of Jim.

"Yes, I did."

"Well, that was a Captain's Order, and I advise you to obey."

"Do it yourself!" shouted the angry Jim, sitting down by the fire.

Aleck looked at him an instant, saw his sulky, set lips, and then walked over to a willow bush near by. From the centre of this bush he cut a thriving switch, and carefully trimmed off all the twigs and crumpled leaves. It was as pliant and elastic as whalebone. It whistled through the air, when it was waved, like a wire or a thin lash. It would hug the skin it was laid upon, and wrap tightly around a boy's legs, and sting at the tip like a hornet. It wouldn't raise a welt upon the skin, as an iron rod or a rawhide might do, but it would hurt just as bad while it was touching you.

Jim knew all this, and it flashed through his brain, every bit of it, as he saw Aleck trim the switch.

"Better scoot, Youngster," Tug advised, with a grin that was meant kindly, but made Jim madder than ever.

"Please get the rushes," coaxed Katy.

But when Aleck came back the boy still sat there, defiant of orders.

"Now, James," he said, as he stood over him, "you have been ordered by your Captain to go and get some rushes.

You refuse. You are insubordinate. I'll give you just one minute to make up your mind what you will do."

Jim glanced up, saw the determined face and stalwart form of his brother; saw Tug keeping quiet and showing no intention of interfering; saw the awful willow. He rose quickly from his seat, and darted away into the scrub alders and willows as hard as he could run, but not towards the rushes.

Aleck didn't follow him. "Never mind," he said. "Go on with your supper, Katy. That boy gets those rushes before he has any grub to eat or blankets to lie in, unless you both vote against it, and I don't think you will, for it was a reasonable order."

"Well, Captain," said Tug, "I think we might ease up on it a little. It was a little rough on The Youngster sending him alone in the dark to get the stuff. If you had sent me with him, I suppose he'd have gone fast enough. If you'll say so now, I allow he'll surrender and save his hide. For that matter, I don't mind getting 'em alone if you'll let the kid go. I was going to propose it myself just as you gave the order."

"That's very kind of you, Tug; but I couldn't allow you to get them alone. You may help if you want to."

"May I tell him so?" Katy asked, eagerly.

"Yes, if you can find him."

"I'll find him — look out for the bacon;" and the girl went off into the gloom and the bushes, calling, "Jim! Jim!"

It was a good while before she came back, and the boys, tired of waiting, had forked out the bacon, and were eating their meal, which was what the poets call "frugal," but immensely relished all the same.

Suddenly Katy and the culprit stalked out of the ring of shadows that encircled the fire, bearing huge bundles of yellow rushes.

"That ain't fair!" cried Tug. "You ought to have let me gone, Katy."

"Oh, I didn't mind, and I wanted Jim to hurry back."

"I didn't want her to carry none," said Jim, more eager about self-defense than grammar. "If I give up, I want to give up all over, and not half-way."

"Good for you, Youngster," Aleck shouted, leaping up. "Give us your hand!"

Thus peace was restored, and the boy sat down happily to his well-earned supper, while the older ones spread the crisp reed-straw. Finding there wasn't quite enough, they went off to the marshes and brought two more armfuls, which made a warm and springy couch for the whole party.

These "rushes" were not rushes, properly speaking, but the wild rice which grows so abundantly on the borders of

the great lakes, and throughout the little ponds and shallow sheets of water that are dotted so thickly over Wisconsin and southern Minnesota. It is like a small bamboo jungle, for the close-crowding stiff reeds often stand ten feet or more above the water. They bear upon the upper part of their stalks a few ribbon-like leaves, and each reed carries a plume which in autumn contains the seeds, or the "rice."

The botanical name of the plant is *Zizania aquatica*; and among it flourish not only the common white and yellow water-lilies, but that splendid one, the *Nelumbium luteum*, which Western people call the lotus.

This rice formed an important part of the food of the Indians who lived where it grew. In and out of the marshes run narrow canals, kept open by the currents, and through these the Indian women would paddle their canoes, seeking the ripe heads, which they would cut off and take ashore to be threshed out in the wigwam, or else they would shake and rub out the rice into a basket as they went along. At home the rice would be crushed into a coarse flour in their stone mortars, then made into cakes baked on the surface of smooth stones heated in the coals.

The stalks, round, smooth, and straight, were of service to the Indians also. Out of them they made mats and thatching for their lodges, and they served as excellent



arrow-shafts, a point of fire-hardened wood, of bone, or of flint having been fixed in the end.

In warm weather these broad, submerged marshes, undulating in color-waves—green in spring, golden-yellow in midsummer, and warm reddish-brown in October—as the breeze swept across the vast extent of pliant reeds, formed the home of a great variety of animals, whose numbers were almost unlimited. There, in the darkly stained water, lurked hosts of small shells and insects—dragon-flies, beetles, and aquatic bugs and flies, whose habits were always a matter for curiosity. Then, where insects and mollusks were so numerous, of course there were plenty of fishes, great and small, the little ones feeding on the bugs and snails, the larger on them, and some giants—like the big pike—on these again. Nor did this end the list. After the big fish came the muskrat; after the muskrat—in the old days, at least—sneaked the wolverine; after the wolverine crept the stealthy panther; and for the panther an Indian lay in wait.

The marshes were full of birds, too, in the bird-season—small, piping wrens; suspicious sparrows; ducks and rails and gallinules of many kinds and many voices; herons and cranes and hawks; coming and going with the seasons, making the yellow reeds populous with busy lives, and vocal with their merriment. Now, however, all was silent.

Our travellers would have preferred skating across the

marshes rather than outside upon the windy lake, but it was reported that warm springs came out of the ooze in many parts of the rice morass, keeping the ice so weak (though not melting it quite away) as to make skating unsafe. This danger was not so great, perhaps, in a winter so unusually cold as this one was proving itself to be, as it had been shown to be in milder seasons; but they did not want to run risks.

“How noisy it will be all around this islet in three months from now!” Aleck remarked, as they were preparing for bed. “Then you will hardly be able to hear yourself speak for the frogs.”

“Before there were any lighthouses on the lake,” said Tug, “sailing was pretty much guesswork; but my father told me the sailors, when they approached the shore, used to know where they were by listening to the bull-frogs. The bulls would call out the names of their ports, you know: San—*dúsk*—y! To—*l-é-e-e*—do! Mon—*róe*! De—*tró-i-i-i*—it!”

CHAPTER IX.

SKATING BY COMPASS.

THE next day was Sunday. Fortunately, the sacred day had found them in such a position that they could spend it quietly. Katy persuaded Jim and the two young men to listen while she read them some chapters from the little Testament she had carefully packed among her "necessary articles."

This, together with the work that *must* be done, took up a good part of the morning, and the afternoon was spent in making a trip to the boat, looking the situation over carefully, and laying plans for a very early start the next day. Supper over, they soon crawled into bed, and woke at day break, ready for work, and all the better for their day of rest.

After a hasty breakfast camp was broken, and work was resumed at the hummock. All hands labored with such a will that long before noon they had let the boat down to the smooth white plain upon the other side; and though it got away from them at the last minute, and went spinning off on its own account, no harm was done.

The onward march was then resumed, and splendid headway made. At noon a short halt was called and gladly accepted, all lounging upon the straw and boxes in the boat, munching crackers and cheese, and drinking Katy's cold chocolate. The sun had been out all the morning, and the ice was not only a trifle soft, but frequently rough, which had made the skating and dragging a little harder work than before.

No land appeared ahead, but Aleck knew the name and position of a lighthouse just visible upon an island at the mouth of a river away off at their right. He therefore took out of his pocket a small map of the western end of the lake, that he had copied from a big chart, and began to study it. He found that it was about fifteen miles across the end of the lake to a certain cape on the southern shore, which lay beyond the great marshy bay into which emptied the river just mentioned. He took the direction of this cape from where they were at present, by compass, and made a note of it in his pocket-book. It was almost exactly south-east. Aleck reckoned on reaching so near there by sundown that the party could go ashore if very hard pushed by any misfortune or bad turn of the weather, though it was too long a march to make unless they were compelled.

"But supposing we find open water, and have to change our course?" asked Katy.

“Well, we shall know, at all events, that we mustn’t go east of southeast, and must try to keep as close to that direction as possible. I don’t like this sunshine and westerly breeze. I’d much rather the weather kept real cold.”

“Why?” said Jim. “It’s much nicer when it’s warm.”

“I’m afraid of snow and fogs, Youngster. Now let us be off.”

No snow or fog came to bother them, however, and at sunset they were out of sight of any landmark, and traveling by the compass, like a ship at sea.

You may ask, How could they be sure they were following it truly, since they had no object, like a long bowsprit, to guide the eye in ranging their course into line with the needle point, as the steersman on a ship does when he glances across his binnacle?

This is the plan they took: The compass was a small one, but it was hung in a box so as always to stand level. It was, in fact, an old boat compass which Mr. Kincaid had had for many years. This was set exactly in the middle of the seat at the stern of the boat, where Katy still skated, with her hands resting upon the stern-board. Here she could keep her eye easily upon the face of the compass, and make a straight line from its pointer through the middle of the boat. When the compass point “southeast” and the stem-post of the yawl were in line, she knew they were

going on a straight course. When these were out of line, she knew her team had swerved, and she called out "Right!" or "Left!" to bring them back to the true course, just as a quartermaster would order "Port!" and "Starboard!" to his helmsman.

The sun went down slowly at their right hands as they rushed along, and as Jim saw his shadow stretching taller and taller, he found it difficult to keep pace with the older lads. Noting this, the Captain ordered a halt, and put Jim into the boat as a passenger, tying his sled behind.

"Don't you want to ride also?" asked Tug of Katy, very gallantly.

Katy was tired, and one of her skate-straps chafed her instep a little, but she didn't propose to give up.

"Oh, no," she said, cheerily. "I have so much help by resting on the stern of the boat that I can go a long time yet before I give in. Besides, who would steer?"

So they rushed away again, the clink-clink of their strokes keeping perfect time on the smooth ice. All at once—it was about four o'clock in the afternoon now—a dark line appeared ahead, and in a few moments more they could plainly see open water across their path.

When they became sure of this they went more slowly, and in about ten minutes had approached as close as they dared to a wide space like a river, beyond which white ice

could be seen again. Here all knew they must spend the night, for it would be foolish to attempt to cross before morning.

"Well," remarked Tug, as they came to a halt, "according to orders, it's my duty to take the axe and cut fuel; so I can loaf, for there's no wood to chop round here that I see;" and he pretended to search in every direction.

"Loaf? Not a bit of it," shouted Aleck, with a grin. "My order to you is, Unload that tent, and set it up on the ice! Jim will help you. I'll help Katy make a fire."

"I wish you would," said the girl. "I'm 'fraid I shouldn't make it go very well out here. I have never built a kitchen fire on ice."

"This is the best way."

Saying this, Aleck took two of the largest pieces of wood from Jim's sled, and laid them down a little way apart. Then he laid across them a platform of the next largest sticks, and on top of this arranged his kindling, ready to touch a match to.

"We won't set the fire going till we are quite ready for it, and—"

"But I'm cold," Jim complained.

"Well, Youngster, I've heard that the Indians never let their boys come near the lodge fire to get warm, but bid them run till they work the chill off. You'd better

move livelier if you want to get warm, for we can't afford any more fire than is necessary for a short bit of cooking. Katy, what do you propose to have?"

"I thought I would make tea, boil potatoes, and bake some johnny-cake in my skillet. May I?"

"Oh, yes, but you must economize fuel."

With this warning, Aleck struck a match, and the little fire was soon blazing merrily in the "wooden stove," as Katy called it. Only one or two sticks had been burned clear through before the fire had done its work, and was put out in order to save every splinter of wood possible. They sat down in the shelter of the boat to eat their dinner, and enjoyed it very much, in spite of the cold, their loneliness, and the gathering darkness.

Meanwhile the tent had been set up. Over its icy floor were laid the thwarts taken out of the boat, the rudder, and two box covers, which nearly covered the whole space. On top of this was placed as much straw as could be spared, and upon the straw Aleck and Tug spread their blankets.

Dinner out of the way, the after-part of the boat was cleared out and re-arranged, until a level space was left. Here, upon a heap of straw, beds for the younger ones were arranged. Then the spare canvas was spread across like an awning, and was held up on an oar laid lengthwise. This made a snug cabin for Katy and the wearied Jim, who

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were not long in creeping into it. Rex followed, and slept in the straw at their feet, which was good for them all.

With the coming of darkness came also a damp sort of cold, that caused them to huddle close in their blankets; and though they presently fell asleep, it was with a shivering sense of discomfort that spoiled the refreshment.

Midnight passed, and Aleck, only half awake, was trying to tuck his blankets closer about him without disturbing his bedfellow, when the tent was suddenly struck by some large object, and considerably shaken. Alarmed and puzzled at the same time, Aleck paused to listen an instant before rising, when the shrieks and barking of the sleepers in the boat came to his ears. He sprang out of his blankets only in time to see two shadowy objects rise from the camp, and drift away across the face of the moon, which was just rising.

"Wh-what w-was that?" came from two scared figures sitting bolt-upright in the yawl, their tongues stuttering with terror and cold combined.

"I don't know." Aleck was as bewildered, if not quite as much frightened, as they.

"Humph!" cried Tug's voice, behind; "you're a pretty set to be scared out of your wits and wake everybody up on account of two birds. They're nothing but snow-owls. Go to bed, or we'll all freeze."

"Wh-wh-what are they?" asked Jim, his teeth playing castanets in spite of all his efforts to control them.

"Tell you in the morning," was the reply. "Go to bed. Come in, Cap'n. Owls are nothing. Come to bed."

This seemed good advice, however gruffly given; but you can hardly expect a person to mince his phrases at two o'clock of a winter's morning, on an ice-floe. Aleck was ready to comply, but he was too cold.

"I must get warm first, and so must you, Jim." Katy had wisely disappeared some time before, and said she was pretty comfortable. "Come and run with me till we get our blood stirring."

Neither of the boys had dared undress at all, so it only remained for Jim to creep out from under the canvas, and limp stiffly to his brother's side. Then hand in hand they raced up and down the ice half a dozen times in the pale greenish moonlight. Once or twice they disturbed an owl perched on the ice, or heard wild hooting—a sound so hollow and unearthly that they could not tell whether it came from near by or far off.

This strange voice and the gray, silent half-light on the wide waste gave them a very lonely and dismal feeling, and when they had put themselves into a glow by exercise, they were very glad to creep back into their beds.

CHAPTER X.

AN UGLY FERRIAGE.

THE sun had been up an hour when Aleck woke again, and pulled Tug's ear, at which that young gentleman sat up and was going to fight somebody right away. But Aleck pounced on him, and pinned him down before he could stir or strike.

"No time for fooling," he laughed in his chum's face; "but if there were I'd like to take you out to the creek here and duck you for your disrespect to your superior officer. Will you touch your cap if I let you up?"

"Ye-e-s," Tug replied, as he felt the strength of the Captain's grip; "but I'm not sure about your duckin' me!"

"Nor I," laughed Aleck, and he leaped away, to go and wake up the others by kicking on the side of the boat.

The morning was beautiful, and by the time breakfast was ready the tent had been struck, and the big boys had come back from an exploration to say that they could go almost to the brink of the open water.

"It must be a 'lead,'" exclaimed Katy. "That's the name arctic travellers give to a wide crack in the ice, by taking

advantage of which, whenever it leads in the right direction, vessels are able to make their way through the 'packs' and 'fields.'"

"Probably their *leading* vessels through is where they get the name," Aleck remarked.

"Shouldn't wonder," said Tug; "but however well that plan may work in the arctic regions, we must *cross* this one."

Getting everything ready at the brink of the canal occupied fifteen minutes. Then, all the cargo easy to be moved having been taken out, the boat (sledge and all, as an experiment for this short trip) was launched without mishap. The sledge bobs hanging on her bottom weighted her down, and canted her so much, though the water was perfectly smooth, that it was necessary to make the trip very carefully. The young voyagers were thus taught that for any real navigation the boat must always be removed from the sledge. By noon, however, the last ferriage was successfully made, and they had repacked and were ready to go on again as soon as they had eaten a "bite." While despatching this, Katy suddenly exclaimed:

"Oh, I have never once thought about our visitors last night. I'll confess I was dreadfully frightened. How did you know they were owls?"

"Saw 'em," Tug replied, shortly, with his mouth full of dried beef. "Couldn't be anything else this time o' year."

"Where do they come from?"

"From 'way up north. Don't your arctic book say anything about 'em? Maybe it calls 'em the 'great white' or 'snowy' or 'Eskimo' owls."

"I think I remember something about them. The Eskimos have a superstitious fear of them, haven't they?"

"Yes, and lots of other people, for that matter. Why, only last winter one of 'em lit on the roof of a house out in the country where I was staying, and the old woman there began to rock back and forth, and whine out that some dreadful bad luck was coming. But that's all nonsense."

"I guess its cry has given it a witch-like reputation," said Aleck. "It sounded uncanny enough last night; didn't it, Jim? But what were they doing away out here?"

"Oh, I s'pose they were flying 'cross the lake, and had stopped to rest on our tent-ridge, till we startled them. I bet they were worse scared than you were. You see, their proper home is in the arctic regions. That's where they build their nests, putting them in trees and in holes in rocks. But when winter comes up there, and the snow gets so deep and the cold so severe that all the small animals he feeds on have retired to their holes or else left the country, Mr. Owl has to get up and flit too, or he will starve to death. So he works his way down here. They say these great

white owls—why, they're bigger than the biggest cat-owl you ever saw—never go far south of this, and I know that we don't see many of 'em except when we have a very severe winter. But I've talked enough. Let's get out of this."

The sunshine by this time was interrupted by dark clouds that rose in the west, and puffs of damp, chilly air began to be felt by the skaters, who wrapped themselves a little closer in their overcoats as they measured their steady strokes. Still no land came in sight, but they thought this must be owing mainly to the thick air to the southward. Once they thought they saw it, but the dark line on the horizon proved to be a hummock, not so bad as the one lately passed, but still troublesome, and closely followed by a second. The lifting and tugging tired them all greatly, and after the second barrier had been climbed they found themselves on ice which was incrustated with frozen snow, and exceedingly unpleasant to skate upon. But a few rods farther on there appeared a narrow stream of open water, beyond which the ice looked hard and green.

"Let us cross, and camp on the other side," said Tug.

"Yes," Aleck answered, in a troubled voice. "Do you see that snow storm coming, over there? It'll be down upon us in a jiffy, and there's no telling what next. Yes, let's cross before it gets dark, if we can. There's a hummock over there that will shelter us a bit from the wind, I think."

The anxious tone of his voice alarmed his companions, and all set at work with a will. Yet the snow-flakes had come, and were thick about them, before the second ferryage had been made, and the wet and ice-clogged boat was lifted out of the water.

Nobody *said* as much, but it is safe to believe that each of our four friends *thought*, to himself, that if every day's work in advance was to be like this one, they had undertaken a prodigiously difficult and dangerous experiment in this skating expedition; and perhaps each one wondered whether the winter would be long enough to carry them to their destination at this rate of progress, even should they be able to surmount the fast-recurring obstacles in safety.

CHAPTER XI.

CAMPING AGAINST AN ICE WALL.

"Now what?" asked Tug, holding his head very high to prevent the snow going down the back of his neck. "Now what?"

"Now," Aleck answered, in a tone of command, "get the boat up there under the lee of that hummock. Everybody take hold."

The ropes were seized with a will, but the heavy boat could not be dragged in the snow until it had been lightened; then by great exertion it was taken over the fifty yards that lay between the water and the hummock. At that spot the ice had been thrust up like a smooth wall about fifteen feet high, which overhung slightly, so as to form a cosey shelter from the storm. The bow of the boat was swung close against its foot, while the stern was slanted away until there remained a space of about eight feet between it and the smooth face of the hummock at that end. Tug and Jim went back after the sled and what baggage had been left behind at the "lead," while Aleck and Katy began to contrive a shelter.

To manage this they cleared out the movable things in the boat, arranging all the cargo (except the mess chest), as fast as it was removed, in the shape of a wall extending across from the stern of the boat to the hummock. In this way, with the help of thwarts, two oars, and some blocks of ice, a rough wall was raised, about four feet high, enclosing a three-cornered space eight feet in width, having the hummock and starboard side of the boat for its sides, and the cargo wall (through which a hole had been left as a doorway) for its end or "base."

Next, a roof must be contrived. The mast and two oars were set in a leaning position from the outer gunwale of the boat, where they rested firmly upon the thwart-cleats, up against the hummock, to which they were securely wedged.

It had now become dark, and Katy lighted the lantern. Tug and Jim, covered with snow, brought their last sled-load and added it to the wall, throwing all their little stock of firewood, which amounted to about three bushels, into the hut. Then all hands set to work in the wind, which blew in sharp gusts now and then over the crest of the hummock, to stretch the sails upon the rafters formed by the mast and oars and thus form an awning-roof.

The handling of the heavy mainsail proved an extremely difficult matter. Once it blew quite away from their grasp, and went off in the darkness, but Jim and the dog gave

chase, and soon caught it, Rex grabbing it with his teeth, and so holding on to it till the others came to the rescue. At the next attempt they succeeded in fastening one end, after which the task grew easier.

The mainsail fairly in place, the jib was next hoisted across the end, and here its leg-of-mutton shape was a great advantage, for when the broad lower part was hung against the hummock wall the narrowing peak just fitted between the sloping roof and the top of the wall.

When the two sails had been fastened, the party found themselves covered rudely but pretty tightly, and the spare canvas remained to serve as a carpet, which was greatly needed. Plenty of snow and cold were "lying round loose" yet, but to be inside was far better than to be out of doors. That this safety and warmth were possible to their frail structure was owing, of course, to the fact that it stood under the lee of the tall ice wall, which acted as a shield against the force of the gale.

"Really, the wind does us more good than harm now," Aleck remarked, "for it drifts the snow under the boat-sledge and against the wall, and, if it keeps on, will soon stop up all the holes, and leave us boxed into a tighter house than our old snow-chinked cabin back at the river."

"Mebbe it'll bury us," said Jim, in an awful whisper.

"Guess not. Anyhow, we can have a fire first—there are



holes enough left yet to let the smoke out. Tug, just shovel the drifted snow out of the house, or pack it between the bobs under the boat, while I whittle some kindling. There won't any more blow in—the drift's too high now."

"Shall I boil tea or coffee?" asked Katy.

"Coffee, I guess; and give us some fried bacon and crackers—but lots of coffee."

"Why couldn't we use our oil stove now?"

"We don't really need to. We have some wood, and can build a fire well enough inside here, and the oil is easier carried than the wood for a greater need. Ready, Tug?"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"All right. Here are our kindlings. Katy, open your lantern, and let me set these shavings afire. Matches are too precious to be wasted or even risked."

A minute later a brisk little fire was burning, snow was turning to water, and cold water to hot, while coffee was thinking that presently it would be in the pot, and slices of bacon were saying good-bye to their fellows, as one by one they dropped into the frying-pan.

It was a strange scene, but the actors in it were too tired and hungry to notice how they looked, as they watched with eager interest the progress of supper-getting. They were not cold, and wraps were all thrown aside, for the wind was cut off, and the fire, small as it was, made a great deal

of heat in the confined space. The atmosphere of an Eskimo house of ice, though there may be no better fire than a little pool of train-oil in a soapstone saucer, where a wick of moss is smoking and flaring, will become so warm that the people remove not only their furs, but a large part of their under-clothing, and this when the temperature outside is fifty degrees or so below freezing-point.

"It is just about big enough for a play-house," Katy remarked, as she jostled one and another in moving about.

"I'm glad the snow blows over, and doesn't settle on the roof. If it did, I'm afraid the canvas would sag down awfully, or the oars break."

"How will we sleep to-night?" asked Jim.

"Well," said Aleck, "I think we must all sleep in the boat somehow. Katy and you can lie on the straw in the stern-sheets, as usual, and Tug and I will bunk in somewhere for'ard. If we had plenty of wood to keep the fire going, it would be comfortable out here, but we must economize. If this snow keeps on, I don't know when—"

"Supper!" called Katy, and Aleck didn't finish what he was saying; but they all felt a little more serious about their situation. Though Jim objected, Aleck ordered him to put out every bit of the fire, and perched up in the boat they ate their supper by the light of the lantern.

"It's precious lucky we found this straw in the cabin,"

said Tug, as he sat upon it, with a tin cup of coffee in one hand, and in the other a sandwich made of two pieces of cold johnny-cake and a slice of bacon.

"That's cool! The *luck* is that Kate had the good sense to make us bring it. I know two young fellows who objected."

"I know *three*," Katy spoke up. "Fair play. You sneered at me at first, Mr. Captain, as much as anybody. You needn't play goody-goody over the rest of them."

"Go in, Katy!" they both cried. "Give it to him! He was going to leave every bit behind—and the rushes too."

"Well, well," pleaded Aleck, "I know now it was a good idea, and I'm not always so—"

"—big a fool as you look, eh?" exclaimed Tug, giving them all a laugh at the face made by the tall fellow, who was thus cheated out of his smooth apology.

"Never you mind; I'll get even with you before long."

Then the Captain took out his watch and wound it. Holding it in his hand he said: "Now it's *my* turn. I'll give you merry jesters just four minutes to finish your supper and make your beds. Then I blow out the lantern. Oil is precious."

CHAPTER XII.

SNOWED UNDER.

THERE was a roguish twinkle in the Captain's eye, as though oil was not so precious but that they might have burned a few more drops of it; but an order was an order, and everybody was quite ready for darkness when it came, except Tug.

Then, how pitchy it was, and how the wind sung and whizzed over their rough-edged shield of ice, now and then catching the border of the ill-stayed tent and giving it a furious flap, as though about to throw it over! But weariness and warmth—for often snowy nights are not so cold as clear ones—closed ears as well as eyes, and when they awoke it was gray light in the tent, and half-past seven o'clock in the morning.

Katy was the first one to peep over the gunwale of the boat, though Aleck was already awake.

"Is the place full of snow?" he asked.

"No, but the canvas sags a good deal."

"Well, you keep under your blankets till Tug and I—get

out of this, mate!—have cleared up the floor a little, and built a fire. I'm afraid we won't get away from here to-day."

After breakfast the two larger lads crawled over the wall, sinking up to their waists in the snow as they stepped off. Struggling out, they climbed up a little way upon the crest of the hummock, where it had been swept clear of snow by the wind, which had now subsided; but nothing could be seen through the veil of thick-flying flakes except the dirty gray of their canvas roof and the thin wisps of smoke that curled upward from beneath it. All else was pure white, sinking on every side into a circle of foggy storm. Around the outer side of the boat and the end of the house drifts had been heaped up even on to the edge of the canvas, so that their house had become a cave between the ice and the snow-bank.

"It's snug enough," said Tug.

"Yes, but I should hate to starve to death or freeze there, all the same," Aleck replied.

"But it ain't very cold—and—and—say! we've lots of food, haven't we?"

"Enough for about ten days, if we put ourselves on precious short rations; but most of it—the flour and bacon and so on—must be cooked, and this takes fire, and fire needs fuel, which is just what we haven't got. If we should

use every bit of wood there is except the boat and sledge, there wouldn't be enough to cook our food for ten days. Besides, though it isn't cold now, it's likely to turn mighty cold after this snow-storm, and then we must have a fire, or freeze."

"But we could get ashore back at the Point in a day's travel. Or, for that matter, the south shore can't be far off, though we can't see it through this fearful storm."

"If we had clear ice it would be all right, but how can we travel in this snow? It can't be less than two feet deep everywhere for miles and miles. You and I might go a little way, but Katy and The Youngster couldn't budge twenty steps. It's really a serious scrape we have brought ourselves into; and we ought to have thought about this before we started. Talk about Dr. Kane! He never was worse off in the arctic regions than we're likely to be right here in a day or two, unless something happens."

Aleck certainly was very down-hearted, and his companion did not seem much disposed to "brace him up," as he would have expressed it. He could only reply, in an equally discouraged voice,

"I don't see what *can* happen out here—for good."

"Nor I. Let's go in; it's no use standing here in the

storm. But, mind you, no word of all this to the others yet."

All day long the snow sifted down in fine, dense flakes that piled up higher and higher around their house, though there was enough wind to keep it from collecting on the roof, which was very fortunate. They sat in the boat, half nestling in the straw; told stories; made Tug tell them everything he could think of about animals and shooting; invented puzzles, Aleck setting some hard sums; mended clothes—this, of course, was Katy's amusement; and guessed at conundrums. Here Jim outshone all the rest. He was sharper with his answers than any of them, and finally proposed the following:

"Ebenezer Mary Jane, spell it with two letters?"

They knit their brows over it, pronounced it impossible to solve, and gave it up.

"I-t, *it*," says Jim, and carried off the honors.

Tired of this, they listened while Katy read from the precious book of Norwegian stories, and then chapter after chapter out of the little red Testament.

"'Twouldn't be a bad scheme for some raven to bring *us* food," said Tug, thoughtfully. "I reckon Elisha's wilderness wasn't a worse one than this ice-plain."

"The Eskimos, Dr. Kane writes, eat the raven himself sometimes, in their snow-deserts, which Elisha wouldn't have done on any account, I suppose."

"No. That would have been like Æsop's fable of killing the goose that laid the golden eggs."

"Yes, so it would," Katy responded; "but the Eskimos have lots of other birds to eat—auks and guillemots, and eider-ducks, and mollemokes."

"But they're on the sea, where those birds live in enormous flocks, like our wild pigeons up in the pine woods—millions of 'em!" Tug exclaimed, with outstretched arms. "No such a thing on our lake after the blackbirds leave the marshes."

"Except owls," interposed Jim; "and we can't eat them."

"I feel as though even an owl-stew wouldn't be bad about now," Aleck replied.

Nevertheless, when lunch-time came, both the big boys vowed they were not a bit hungry, and refused to eat. Katy took only a cracker, but Jim ate three crackers and the last bit of the cold ham, picking the bone so clean that, big as it was, Rex, who was frightfully hungry, could get little comfort out of it, though he gnawed at it nearly all the afternoon. Then Tug smashed it for him, and gave him another try, which he appreciated highly.

"Poor Rex!" said Katy, with a sigh. "Travellers get so badly off they have to kill and eat their dogs sometimes"—Rex stopped crunching, and looked up with a glance of alarm at this—"and if we should—"

“What a grand time Rex would have at his own bones!” interrupted Tug — a joke the utter absurdity of which wrinkled the faces that had become straight into hearty laughter. Towards evening a fire was built, which used the last of the sticks and one of the box-covers before the biscuits could be baked in the skillet, the ham fried, and tea made.

“I’m ’fraid it won’t be long before I shall have to try the little stove,” said Katy.

“I had no idea we were so near the end,” Aleck muttered, under his breath.

The meal that evening was a very dull one, and if they did not go to sleep at once after they had gone to bed, certainly there was little fun-making among the weather-bound prisoners. Aleck said afterwards he thought he slept about an hour that night, and Katy was sure she didn’t really get soundly asleep at all; but it is difficult to lie awake *all* night, though your rest may be so broken that you think in the morning you have never once lost your knowledge of what was going on.

CHAPTER XIII.

SAVED FROM STARVATION.

WHEN they arose next morning the air was much lighter, for it was no longer snowing. Breaking their way out after breakfast, Aleck and Tug climbed to the crest of the hummock above the house, where pretty soon they were joined by Katy and Jim, anxious to get a look abroad. There was not much satisfaction in this, though. On all sides stretched an unbroken area of white—a spotless expanse of new snow such as you never can see on land, for there was nothing to break the colorless monotony, except where the hummock stretched away right and left, half buried, and as white as the rest, save at a few points where crests of upturned ice-blocks stood above the drifts.

“There is a higher point a little way over there,” said Aleck to Tug; “let’s go across, and see if it will show us anything new.”

“Mayn’t we come?” asked Jim.

“No, Youngster, stay with Katy. It would be a useless journey for you, and we’ll soon be back.”

And off they went, floundering up to their waists much of the time.

"Jim," says Katy, "I see, just beyond the hut"—pointing in the direction opposite to that in which the lads had gone—"a space under the edge of the hummock where the ice seems pretty clear. Understand? And look! don't you see that long, dark line there? I wonder what it can be? Let us go and find out. We can get along easily enough after a few steps."

Jim strode ahead, and stamped down a path for Katy through the snow that lay between their house and the clear space of ice that had been swept by the eddy under the hummock, until, a moment later, they were both running along upon a clean floor towards the object they had seen. Now they could make it out clearly; and at the first discovery Jim tossed his cap high in the air and gave a hurrah, in which the girl joined, wishing she too had a cap to throw up. What do you suppose it was that had so excited and gladdened them? Can't you guess?

A log of wood frozen into the ice!

"Now we can have all the fire we want."

"And I can keep the coffee hot for the second cup."

Then they looked at one another, and laughed and clapped their hands again. Were two children ever before made so happy by the simple finding of a log?

Just then they heard Aleck's voice:

"Hallo-o-o! Where are you?"

Jim jumped up, and was about to shout back, but his sister threw her hand over his mouth.

"Stop, Jimkin! Let them look for us, and have the fun of being surprised by our great discovery."

So both kept quiet, and let the boys shout. By and by they saw their heads bobbing over the drift, and presently Tug came running towards them, with Aleck close behind.

"Why didn't you answer? Didn't you hear us? Hello! Whoop—la! Wood, or I'm a Dutchman!" and all echoed his wild shout, and tried to imitate his dance, until the joy was bumped out of them by sudden falls on the slippery ice.

It was a tree trunk of oak, that had been floating about, frozen into the ice, above the surface of which fully half of it was to be seen. The stubs of the roots were towards them, while the upper end of the tree, which had been a large one, was lost in a drift more than forty feet distant.

"There is enough good wood here," said Aleck, "to keep us warm for two months, if we don't waste it; and we ought to be very thankful."

"Then let's have a fire right away!" Jim exclaimed.

"All right, Youngster," was the Captain's response. "Fetch the axe, and we'll soon light up."

When Jim had disappeared, Katy asked her brother what he had seen.

"Nothing," was the reply. "And it would just be impossible to move half a mile a day in this snow. It's one of the deepest falls I ever saw. We've got to stay here, for all I see, till it melts, or crusts over, or blows away, or something else happens."

"Well, we have plenty of fuel now."

"Yes, but we can't live on oak—though we might on acorns. But here comes Jimkin. Let's say no more about it now, Katy."

As the chips flew under Tug's blows, Katy gathered an armful, and hastened back to kindle a fire, while Jim and Aleck busied themselves in clearing a good path, and in hauling the hand-sled from under the boat, where it had been jammed into the drift out of the way. By the time it was ready Tug had chopped a sled-load of wood, and they hauled it to the house. It had been very awkward climbing over their wall of boxes, but they had been afraid to move any part of it, for fear of throwing down the snow which had banked it up and made the place so tight and warm. However, there was one box which must shortly be opened in order to get at more provisions; so it was carefully moved, and the wood piled in its place, leaving a low archway underneath, through which they could crawl on their hands and knees.

"That's just like an *igloo*," said Katy.

"What's an 'igloo'?"

"An Eskimo house made of frozen snow, in the shape of a dome, and entered by a low door, just like this one. By the way, are you getting hungry?"

"Yes; bring us something to eat."

They went back to their chopping. Pretty soon Katy came running out, bringing some crackers, a little hard cheese, and the last small jar of jelly—"just for a taste," she explained. Then she broke out with her story:

"Oh, boys, there's a whole lot of little birds—white and brown—around the house. They seem to like to get near the smoke. I'm going to throw out some crumbs."

"Yes, do," said Tug, eagerly, "and I'll get my gun."

"What? to shoot them! Oh, no."

"But they will make good eating."

"Ye-e-s, I suppose so," agreed the kind-hearted girl; "but I hate to have them shot."

"It's hard, I know," Aleck said, sympathizing more with his sister than with the birds, I fear; "but we need everything we can get. It may be a great piece of good-fortune that they have come, and— Hold up, Tug; aren't you afraid if you shoot at them they will be scared away for good?"

"No fear of that," was the answer; "and we have no other way. Come along, Katy, and keep Rex quiet."

Luncheon was stuffed in their pockets, and all hastened towards the house.

There they still were—several flocks of birds resembling sparrows, but larger than any common sparrow, and white; so white, in fact, that they could only be seen at all against the snow by glimpses of a few brown and black feathers on their backs. In each flock, however, there were one or two of a different sort, easily distinguishable by their darker plumage and rusty brown heads. Tug said they were Lapland longspurs, and had pretty much the same habits as their numerous associates. The whole flock of birds was very restless, constantly rising and settling, but showed no disposition to go away, and took little alarm at the four figures that stealthily approached.

“What are they?” whispered Aleck to Tug.

“White snow-flakes, or snow-buntings,” he whispered back. “Mighty good eating.”

Creeping quietly into the house, Tug took his shot-gun out of the boat and hastily loaded it, but with great care to see that the priming was well up in the nipple and a good cap on. Then he slung over his shoulders his shot-pouch and powder-horn—a short, black, well-polished horn of buffalo, of which he was very proud, for it had been a curiosity in Monore—and begged them all to stay in the house and let him alone, unless he called to them, and, above all, to keep the dog inside.

This said, he crawled forward out of the low doorway, holding his gun well in front of him, and the other three sat down to wait for the result.

Scarcely a minute had passed before a sharp report was heard, and a little thud upon the canvas roof. At this sound Rex leaped up, and was greatly excited. His ears were raised, his eyes flashed, and he gave several short, quick barks. But Aleck had twisted his fingers in the dog's mane, and forced him to drop down and keep quiet.

Very soon afterwards there rang out a second report, and again, after time enough to reload, a third. Then the sportsman's voice was heard calling, and all ran out to see how many he had bagged.



"A SHARP REPORT WAS HEARD."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ARCTIC VISITORS.

"HELP me catch these wounded ones!" cried Tug, dancing round in chase of several wing-tipped and lame birds that were floundering in the snow.

The others rushed after them too, and it was exciting sport, for the chase often led them into deep drifts and down the scraggy sides of the hummock; it thus became the scene of many comical tumbles and failures, for several of the birds, having been shot as they crowded together in a bunch, were only slightly wounded, and able to make a vigorous attempt to escape. Rex took part also, but his work consisted chiefly in barking himself hoarse, for all he accomplished was the finding of one dead bird; and this, as he was not a retriever, he devoured on the spot.

When, panting, red-faced, and tired out, they gathered again at the door, they counted up seventeen fat buntings and one long-spur as the result of the three shots. Three of these were badly mangled, and were given to Rex; the others they began at once to make into a stew for supper, which they always ate about sundown. This meal also

took the place of a dinner, as they ate only "a bite" at noon.

While they were plucking the birds—and their bodies seemed wofully small when the thick coat of feathers had been removed—they asked Tug many questions about the buntings. He could not answer all of them, but the substance of what he told them was this :

The snow-buntings—white snow-birds, or snow-flakes—belong to the far northern regions, where they go in summer to make their nests, often within the arctic circle. As soon as their young are able to fly they must begin their southward migration, for the excessive cold and the deep snow cut off all the grass-seeds, mosses, and insects upon which they feed in summer. So they begin to spread southward, not into British America alone, but also into Lapland and Russia, and the lower parts of Siberia. The bird seems to be a lover of cold, and used to scant fare and the roughest climate. It is not always, therefore, that they are to be seen in the United States south of the Great Lakes.

Around these lakes, however, they are likely to come in large flocks after a cold snap or a deep fall of snow. The wild rice tracts and frozen marshes afford them an abundance of seeds and dried berries, upon which they grow fat. Though seeming less in danger than most other birds, since our hawks are gone southward, these buntings are exceedingly restless and timid, which makes them scurry away at the

least alarm. Yet their timidity is not enough to insure their safety, for though they are constantly rising up and settling again, their flights are so short and uncertain that, as we have seen, a good marksman has no difficulty in shooting them. They are so small, however, that in this country of large game-birds they are never shot for food unless a necessity like the present one compels it. With the first bit of warm weather the snow-buntings and their companions, the long-spurs, whirl away to the bleak northward, crowding close upon the heels of Winter as he retreats to his polar stronghold.

In the cool mountainous parts of the Far West there are several species of birds closely akin to the snow-flake, whose summer homes are among the peaks. They belong to the same genus (*Plectrophanes*), but none of them are so white as the Eastern bunting; in fact, like the ptarmigan, he is pure white only in midwinter, changing in summer to a dress much mottled with warm brown and black, traces of which remain in his winter hood and collar.

“What do you suppose brought the snow-flakes away out hither on the ice?” Tug was asked.

“Oh, we’re not so far from land—though we might as well be a hundred miles away for all the good it will do us!—and I suppose they were flying across to the marshes and islands on the north shore. Probably our smoke attracted them.”

Having got done with their birds, the boys returned to their chopping. Two or three large pieces were hacked out as back-logs to build their fire upon, instead of making it right on the ice; and since this last load was not needed in the wall, which had been banked up anew, it was spread around on the floor of the house to lift their canvas carpet above the chilly and often wet floor, for the weather was not cold enough now to keep it frozen always hard and dry under the tent.

Evening came, and with it a feeling of homelike comfort queer to think about, yet not quite impossible under the circumstances, forlorn and dangerous as they were. The boys perched themselves on the gunwale of the boat, and watched Katy making snow-bird stew and steeping the fragrant tea.

Then, how good it tasted! What a royal change from steady bacon and crackers, or tough dried beef, and water!

"I wonder if they'll come again?" said Aleck, examining his friend's gun. "Costs a heap o' powder, though, and the noise scares them. Say, Tug, don't you know how to build traps?"

"I could make a figure four," piped Jim, "if I had the box."

"Guess we could manage that. Ugh! what a frightful smoke!"

"I should say so," added Katy, rubbing her smarting eyes. "I think, if you would punch a hole under the wall, there would be a better draught. That hole in the corner of the roof don't make a very fine chimney."

Tug took his ramrod and worked the snow away from a crevice at the foot of the wall, near the floor. The cooler air outside sucked in to take the place of the heated air within, which ascended to the hole at the edge of the roof, and a draught was set in motion, taking enough of the smoke out to make the place endurable while they ate their supper.

How good that bird soup was! And what fun they had, eating it out of their tin cups with wooden spoons! There was only one bowl for the tea, which had to be passed around for each to drink from in turn. They forgot their difficulties for a little while, and were as merry as anybody could be. All at once Katy stopped short in a laugh, with an exclamation of astonishment:

"I do believe we've never one of us thought what day it is! This is Christmas eve!"

The evening was given to chatting, as they sat in the darkness half illumined by the red embers of their fire, for they wanted to save their lantern oil, and would not allow themselves to burn it uselessly; nor was it late when they went to sleep.

CHAPTER XV.

CHRISTMAS BIRD-CATCHING.

“MERRY Christmas!”

It was the Captain's voice, who felt it a part of his duty to be the first “on deck” in the morning, but had a rival in his sister, who was quite as active as he.

“*Merry* Christmas! this what you call merry?” inquired Jim, fretfully, as with his finger he traced figures in the frost on the under side of the canvas.

“Well, let's try to make it as merry as we can,” Katy cried, cheerfully, from the starboard corner of the stern-sheets.

“I know what I'm going to do,” said Tug—“make bird-traps. I lay awake a long time in the night planning them.”

“While you fellows talkee-talkee I'll build a fire;” and Aleck's tall form was soon bent over the heap of wood, where a blaze was quickly crackling. Tug and Jim followed, and all went out of doors, as was their custom, leaving Katy the whole igloo to herself for a little while.

Immediately after breakfast Tug began on his traps.

He had brought along with him as a part of his baggage what he sometimes called his gunsmith shop. It consisted of a square tin box that would hold about two quarts of chestnuts—if he had had any chestnuts to put in it, which he hadn't. Besides a bag of No. 6 shot, this box contained one of the strangest and most worthless collections of odds and ends of boyish hardware that could be imagined. A catalogue of it would be useless. Among other articles were a knife-blade that long ago had parted from its handle, a brad-awl in the same condition, and a broken bullet-mould bound together by a long winding of fine wire.

These three things the lad picked out and laid aside. Then he turned over the rest of the contents of the box until he had secured several tacks and brads of varied sizes, and a round piece of tin with holes in it. Next he discovered something which made him shout with a joy almost equal to his delight at finding the tree trunk. This best of all the finds, this forgotten treasure in the tin box, was a small coil of horse-hairs. They were the relics of a preparation he had made for a short camping trip into the woods three months before, while the October haze and bright cool air were playing among the rustling autumn leaves. How the scene came back to him! Now these hairs would serve him for a better use than mere amusement. He was carefully unwinding them when Jim rushed in to say that the snow-birds were around again.

"Good!" cried Tug. "Take some crumbs out of the cracker box, and quietly throw them down where the snow-birds can get them. Put 'em on the top of the hummock first, then we'll gradually toll 'em down below. I'll be out in a minute."

Jim got his crackers and vanished. Aleck was chopping wood, and Katy was with him. It was a cold day, but sunny, and there were no signs of the snow melting. Tug, alone in the house, looked fondly at his tools, and having nobody else to speak to, talked to himself.

"We're like the boy and the ground-hog. 'We ain't got no meat for the supper, and the preacher's comin'.' So I guess I'd better leave the twitch-ups and make some common box traps that Kate and the kid can watch. Come here—you!"

This last was addressed to a wooden box about twelve inches square, in which Katy had been wont to pack the small articles of table use. Tug turned them all out, and pulled off the leather hinges that held the cover. Then, taking an oak splinter from the firewood, he cut it to the size of a lead-pencil, and notched it in the middle. In this notch he tied the end of the ball of twine which formed a part of the boat's stores, and cut off a length of about fifteen feet. Next, he drew the locker out of the bearings upon which it rested, emptied it of its contents, and made a stick

and length of twine to fit it in the same way. Lastly, he tore two pieces a foot or so square from their one strong sheet of white paper. He had been at work scarcely ten minutes, but had ready two simple traps. Then he went outside and called to Katy, who came quickly.

"Katy," he said, "I have something for you to do. Please get a blanket and come out on top of the hummock, where you'll find me."

While the girl went inside for the blanket Tug climbed up to the icy hill-top, where a small flock of snow-birds were pecking away at the crumbs Jim had thrown out. The lad crept stealthily towards them, and though the birds moved away, they were not greatly frightened, and did not go far. As quietly and rapidly as possible he spread down his pieces of paper on the highest part of the hummock, at a little distance apart, and not far from the edge of the ice table. Then, setting his boxes bottom upward, he perched each one slantwise upon one of his sticks, and stretched the strings away to the hummock's edge. On the paper underneath the boxes, and somewhat on the snow about them, he spread his bait of crumbs. Then showing Katy, who had now come out, where she could hide herself behind the edge of the upheaved ice cakes, he told her to wrap herself up well in the blanket, and to keep perfectly still till the birds came back. They would pick at the crumbs un-

til by and by one or two of them would be sure to step under the boxes.

"Then," said he, "you jerk your string, the box falls, and Mr. Snow-flake is a prisoner."

So Katy took her position, and Tug, asking Jim to help him, went off to make some other traps.

"Youngster," he directed, "I want you to cut me eight square pieces of ice, each one about as big as a brick, and after that two slabs about eighteen inches square and two or three inches thick. You can take the axe and cut 'em out in big chunks from the hummock, and then saw 'em into shape—here's the saw—and mind you keep away from where Katy is."

"What do you want them for?"

"For traps—never you mind why: you'll see presently," was the lofty reply.

Jim thought it a little unfair, but he good-naturedly took the axe and saw and went to work.

In half an hour he came to say he was done, and was quickly followed by his sister, whose face was beaming.

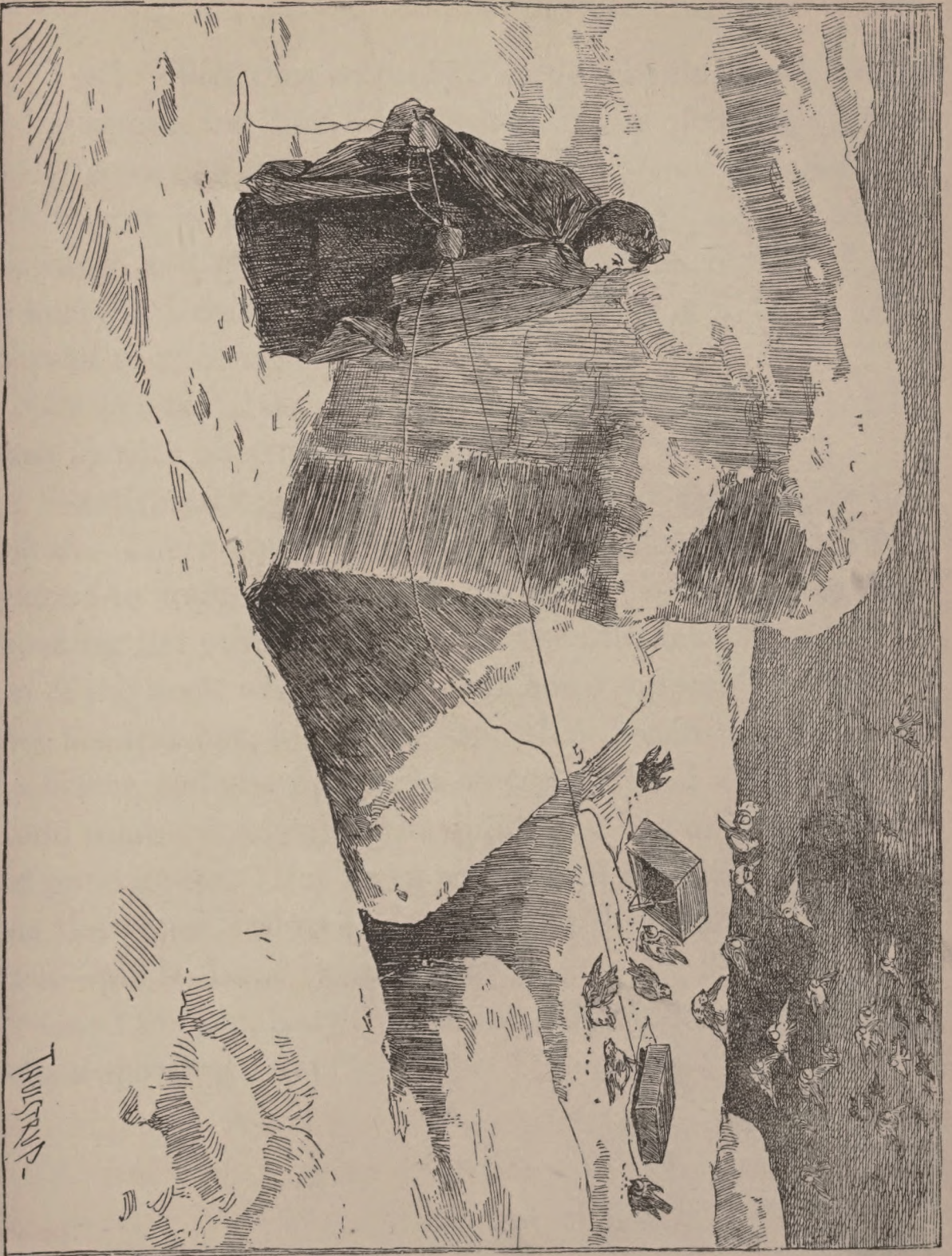
"I've caught three!" she cried.

"Three? Good!"

"Yes, they came, a big flock—about forty, I should think—and chattered and twittered about over the house."

"I heard 'em," Tug exclaimed.

KATY TRAPPING THE SNOW-BUNTINGS.



“Yes? Well, they seemed to enjoy warming their wings in the smoke, for they flew through it lots of times. Then pretty soon one spied a crumb, and I suppose he called his fellows, for in a minute they came all hopping about on the snow, and getting nearer and nearer the boxes. I got so nervous I could hardly hold the strings still, but I kept as quiet as a mouse—”

“Or as a cat after a mouse!” interrupted Aleck, who had come in with an armful of wood.

“—and pretty soon one little bird went right under the locker. There was another close behind him, but I was too anxious to wait, and I pulled the string, catching one and knocking the other over. It made so little noise that the rest of the flock were not alarmed, and I suppose they didn’t miss the lost one, for pretty soon they began to go around the locker, and one flew right on top of it. I was afraid he would tumble it down, but he didn’t, and in a minute another had gone under. But there was a third hopping right towards the paper, and so I just waited till he had run under, when—piff!—I had them both!”

“Good for you, Katy!” cried the delighted boys. “You’ll make a sportsman yet!”

CHAPTER XVI.

HOW TUG MADE "TWITCH-UPS."

"It's cold work, though," Katy replied, "sitting so still out on that ice. I am just stiff."

"I'll fix that all right," Tug said, showing some small forked and notched sticks he had cut out of oaken chips. "Come out with me, and I'll show you how to set a trap that will drop itself, or, rather, where the bird shuts his own prison door."

Gathering up Jim's blocks and slabs of ice, the whole party climbed to the top of the hummock, which, as I have said, was almost the only spot in the wide plain free from deep snow, and Tug went to work.

Making a little hole in the ice, he wedged into it a short, flat-topped peg, and packed a handful of snow about its base.

Then with the brick-like blocks of ice he arranged a hollow square around the peg. On top of the peg he laid the flattened side of the stem of a forked stick, like a letter < laid flat, and on top of that, as though it were a con-



SETTING THE NEW TRAPS.

tinuation of the peg, he set a post about ten inches high. Asking Aleck to hold these twigs in position for him, he took one of the slabs, lodged an end of it on the rim of the little wall made by his "bricks," and gently rested the other end upon the top of the post, which was held in its upright position under the pressure, at the same time keeping the < in place. This arranged, he spread crumbs about the trap and thickly inside. Then he announced it ready.

"Oh, I see how it works," Katy cried. "The bird, in leaping down, is almost sure to perch on the forked twig, or, at least, to strike it. That throws it out of place, and tumbles the whole cover down, shutting him in."

"Correct!" said Tug, admiringly, as he went to work on a second trap of the same kind.

This set, all left the hummock (except Jim, who agreed to take his turn, wrapped in a blanket, at watching the strings) and joined labor in making two or three more of the new ice traps, for now that the birds were plenty, they wanted to capture as many as possible.

"If only I had some sort of a spring," Tug announced, "I could make twitch-ups. I've all the rest of the fixin's, 'cause I found some horse-hairs in my 'shop' this morning; but I don't see how I am to get a springy twig or a strip of whalebone. I had some old umbrella-ribs, but I didn't bring 'em along. Wish I had."

Aleck thought over all his stores, but could remember nothing that would answer the purpose. "How about your ramrod?" he asked.

"Too stiff," Tug replied.

So they gave up talking, and attended to their work. Suddenly Aleck went to the log, split off a strip of oak, and whittled it into a thin rod. "How is that?" he said, as he handed it to his comrade.

Tug beat his hands and blew on his aching fingers a while before answering. Then he bent the rod gently, but before it was curved half as far as he needed, it broke.

"No good. Nothing but hickory will stand the strain."

"I'll tell you what you might do, perhaps," Katy suggested, having come out just in time to witness this little trial. "The handle of the boat-hook is hickory. If you could make an oak handle for that, you could split the hickory up into springles, couldn't you?"

"That's so!—that's a bright idea. Try it, Tug," and the Captain ran off for the boat-hook. The shaft of this was straight-grained, well-seasoned, and tough, but an oaken staff would serve its purpose quite as well.

"I should think that would answer first-rate," said Tug, "but you had better whittle out your oak stick first. It would be rough to be caught suddenly without any handle to our boat-hook."

"That's so," Aleck assented, and took his axe to split a suitable piece from the log.

The making and shaping of a new handle, even in the rough, cost him much labor with his few tools. It was nearly an hour, therefore, before he was ready to pull the irons off the old handle and fasten the new one into its place; and fully another hour had passed by the time this difficult job had been done.

Then, with great care, and by the help of little wedges, a clean, straight splinter about as thick as your finger was split from the tough hickory staff. It was tried by the trap-maker, very gently at first, and bent well, so that it was pronounced serviceable, though not as good as a green twig or sapling, such as one would cut in the woods for the same purpose. It would answer to try with, however, and after a bit of luncheon they watched Tug make his twitch-ups—or, at least, all did except the one on duty at the strings. As Tug himself had to take a turn, he didn't get his traps done in time to put them up that day.

Next morning, however, all were out bright and early to help him do so. The snow-flakes had been there before, however, and one unfortunate had stepped on a treacherous fork, and was caught.

Having arranged two more ice-boxes and letter Y traps, for which the pieces had been cut yesterday, they all gathered around Tug to watch him set his first twitch-up.

With one of the tent spikes he dug a slanting hole in the ice, into which he inserted one end of his hickory splint, which was about four feet long, fastening it firmly by ramming ice and snow down into the hole beside it, which would quickly freeze solid. A short distance from the foot of the splint he then laid down a short board, which was braced at the foot (or end farthest from the splint) against the side of a trough cut in the ice. The remaining three sides of the board were then fenced in by small blocks of ice.

Next, taking from his pocket a cord made by twisting two horse-hairs together, he slipped one end through a loop in the other, thus making a noose, and tied it to the top of the hickory splint. This done, he bent down the splint until he hooked its tip under the nearest end, or head, of the board, which was raised a couple of inches from the ground. Spreading the noose carefully out upon the board, he sprinkled within a particularly nice lot of crumbs, then laid a little train away from the foot of the board as a leader, and the snare was ready. The weight of the bird treading upon the board to get the bait would press it down enough to let the lightly caught whip end of the splint spring up: this would pull the noose with a sudden movement, and the bird would find itself dangling in the air by the legs or a wing, or possibly by the neck.

Removing their captive, and resetting the square trap, the whole party went out of sight to await further results. Yesterday they had captured thirteen birds in all, and had eaten only nine. With three more traps, they ought to do better to-day, and so accumulate a little stock ahead.

“At any rate,” Katy observed, “we’ve plenty of refrigerator room to keep them in.”

They had, indeed—a refrigerator about a hundred miles square!

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BREAKING UP OF THE ICE.

BREAKFAST was late the next morning, for Katy proposed to vary their fare by frying some snow-birds with bacon, and Jim was called upon to help pluck and prepare them—work which did not please that young gentleman very much.

“I suppose now we shall have nothing but snow-birds, snow-birds,” he growled.

“Do try and be a little more cheerful, Jim,” said Katy. “You are always grumbling about something.”

“What else do you want?” asked Tug. “You have got beef, though it’s dried, and bacon and poultry.”

“Flesh, fowl, and good red herring,” quoted Aleck, from an old proverb.

“All but the herring,” grunted The Youngster, crossly. “Now if only we had some fish—”

“Fish!” Tug shouted, leaping to his feet. “Never thought of it, as I’m a Dutchman! Why shouldn’t we? We have only got to cut a hole in the ice, and ‘drop ’em a line,’ as the man told his wife to do when he went off to Californy.”

"Strange we never thought of that," said Katy.

"Strange? I'm the biggest dolt in three counties. Why, I'll catch you some be-'utiful muskallonge for dinner. Come on, Captain. Let's cut a hole while the boy is cleaning those twopenny tomtits."

"Hold on!" cried the disgusted Jim; "I'm coming too."

"No, no, my dear child" (Tug's voice was that of a pitying mother). "Remember Captain's order. You're to be a nice boy, and help in the kitchen. Maybe we'll let you cut the heads off our fishes, if you do well with the birds. Ca-a-reful!" and the tormentor dodged a club hurled by the angry lad, who wished (and said so) that he was only a little bigger.

Jim and Katy both felt it was hard indeed that he should be deprived of this particular fun, in which he took so much interest, and it seemed as though the big fellows might have waited. The cook would willingly have let her scullion depart, but an order was an order, and he had to stay, plucking savagely at the pretty feathers of the innocent buntings, and declining to come back to good-humor, until the lads returned with the report that they had cut two holes in the thin ice that formed over the "lead," which, the reader will remember, was crossed just a few rods back, and now were ready to set their lines.

Here was a chance of revenge. Jim's own line was the

most important one in their small stock. He was tempted to refuse to let them use it; but he was not a bad fellow, and a better heart prevailed.

"You'll find my line and pickerel spoon in that little box of things in our chest," he said.

Tug walked up to him and offered his hand.

"Jeems, I'll accept your apology for throwing sticks of wood at your uncle, and call it square. Agreed?"

"Yes!" said Jim, with a laugh, and peace was restored.

Doubtless you expect an entertaining chapter out of the fishing, but it can't be given if we are to stick to the facts of this cruise. No: the big muskallonge they hoped to catch was somewhere under the ice, but whether it was because he didn't see their bait, or was not tempted, or knew better than to bite, certain is it that none of these giants of winter fishing were caught. With the toothsome pickerel they had better luck, and several were taken on this first and on following days, so that Jim did not lose all the fun by his unlucky engagement in the kitchen. The greatest adventures of the trip were not so much in fishing and hunting as in being fished and hunted *after*; and these were to begin without much delay.

The day the log was found and the first snow-birds were captured it had turned cold again, and it remained so for a whole week; but our heroes were kept busy in watching

the traps, which caught them more snow-birds than they could eat; in attending to the fishing; and in getting wood. The snow did not melt at all, for the weather was very cold indeed, and sometimes the wind blew frightfully, but always in such a way that the hummock sheltered the tent-house pretty well, so that, with the help of a big fire, they could keep warm enough. For amusement, they marked out a checker-board, and played checkers and other games. They tried their hands—or, rather, their heads—at spinning yarns also; they examined each other in geography or grammar, and held spelling competitions, choosing words out of Dr. Dasent's book, which they came to learn almost by heart. At all these studious entertainments Katy was likely to be ahead. But when the subject was turned to arithmetic, Aleck became teacher, for that was his favorite study.

Thus the week had passed, and its close completed the fifteenth day since they had left home, which seemed very far away now. They had no anxiety so long as the weather held cold; or, if any one felt worried, he did not talk about it.

At the end of this week, however, the wind changed in the night to the southward, so that on the eighth morning of their stay in the igloo they found the air almost as balmy as spring, with a gentle breeze from the south. The sun was shining, also, and no birds came near the house all

day. This was compensated for, however, by their taking the largest pickerel yet. Towards noon it clouded up, and began to rain, melting the snow with such rapidity that the whole region was covered with slush. The shapeless tent-roof let streams of water pour in at the sides, and, altogether, affairs were very disagreeable.

No one felt disposed to grumble, however, since, when the snow had been washed away, or cold weather came again to freeze solid the slush and surface-water, they could go ahead on their journey—something all were extremely anxious to do.

The wind continued to blow from the south all night, and when Aleck went out next morning he hurried back with an alarmed face to report that distant open water could be seen in that direction.

“The snow has almost gone. I must take a scout after breakfast, and see what the prospect is.”

As soon as the coffee and fried pickerel had been disposed of, therefore, Aleck set out, taking Jim with him.

When two hours had passed, and the scouts did not return, Tug and Katy became alarmed, and went to the crest of the ridge. It had grown so foggy, however, that nothing could be seen.

“Hadn’t we better make a big smoke,” Katy suggested, “as a signal? The fog might lift for a minute, and

give them a chance to catch sight of it. They must be lost."

"It's a good idea, as are most of your notions, Katy. I'll get some of that wet root-wood, and make a fire on top of the hummock."

It was done, and another hour passed. Chilly with the fog and the raw wind, they had gone down into the hut to get warm, and were just attending to the "kitchen" fire, when their ears were startled by a loud, sharp noise, like the report of a distant cannon, only much sharper; then another, still louder; then a third, somewhat nearer; and, after a minute's interval, a fourth tremendous crash, close by the house, which trembled under their feet and over their heads as though an earthquake had shaken it.

"The ice is cracking!" Tug cried, seizing Katy's hand, and dragging her to the boat, into which both jumped in terror.

An instant later Tug recovered himself. "This is no use," he said. "Our ice is firm just here, and I don't hear her bursting any more. Let's go outside."

"Don't you think we'd better put some of the food-boxes and things into the boat, so that they won't be lost if the ice here should break to pieces suddenly?"

"Yes, we might do that. Let's hurry."

Five minutes was enough for this work, and then both

went out and climbed upon the hummock. They found the whole appearance of things changed towards the south and east. Where, yesterday, had lain one broad white field of solid ice, as far as the eye could reach, now were spread before them (for the fog had lifted a little, so that they could see better) the long, slow waves of a lake of blue water, filled with cakes and wide sheets of floating ice.

"Oh! oh!" Katy cried, wringing her little hands at the thought, "Aleck and Jim are drowned."

"No, I guess not," said Tug, encouragingly. "They are probably safe on some of those big pieces of ice."

"But how will they ever get back?"

"I don't know," her companion answered, slowly. "If only this terrible fog would go away, so that we could see something, perhaps we might help them. I don't know what we can do now but to keep up our smoke."

"I wonder if *we* are afloat?" Katy asked, trying to steady her voice, for she saw how useless it was to weep when so much might be required of her any minute. "Ah, Rex, good dog, what shall we do now? Can't you find your master?"

CHAPTER XVIII.

RESCUING THE WANDERERS.

REX wagged his tail mournfully, and looked at the strange scene, whining as if he understood it all, but was at his wits' end how to act.

"Afloat?" Tug repeated, after a minute. "There are cracks on each side of us, and a narrow one part way behind, between us and that high hummock over there to the southward, which, in my opinion, hides the low, flat land, for I think it is only four or five miles to the shore. But it might as well have been four or five hundred while that snow lasted. Let's watch, and see if the crack gets wider."

"Do you feel quite sure, Tug, that Aleck and Jim are on one of those big cakes of ice?" The tone of Katy's voice was very anxious.

"Yes, I do, Katy. They certainly have not jumped off and drowned themselves on purpose."

This made Katy smile, in spite of her anxiety.

"They surely are not very far off; but, the most alarming part of the business is, how they are to get to us if that

big crack increases to the size of a river. Can you make up your mind whether it is really growing wider?"

In the course of half an hour it became very plain that the crack was getting wider rapidly, and their icy foundation, which they had thought so fixed, had now become a big raft, slowly drifting down the lake under the pushing of the steady west wind—moving a little faster than its companion rafts in the wide waste, because its high hummock served as a sort of sail. All the cakes our watchers could see were much smaller than this one. Occasionally these pieces would crash together, and crumble, or one would slide under the other. Sometimes their own "floe," as Dr. Kane would have called so large a piece, collided with others, but always came off victorious. They came to the conclusion that its having the thick hummock, like a great, solid back-bone, rendered it far stronger than the rest, as well as a better sailer.

Beside them another floe, also bearing a hummock (a section of their own), was pressing its way on, to the ruin of smaller ones. It was separated from their floe by an open canal, perhaps five hundred yards wide, and floated along about even with them, sometimes swinging nearer, sometimes receding. This great cake, an acre or more in extent, lay in the direction whither the absent ones had gone, and it was hoped that they were upon it. This would be

the next best thing to having them safely back, but the chance was a small one, at best.

Talking over these loopholes of escape, Katy and Tug tried to forget their discomforts and dangers, and to show each other cheerful and reliant faces. Nevertheless it was dreary work.

The weary day wore on—the day they thought would perhaps be their last—until night, with its starless gloom, was surrounding the desolate picture of grinding ice and of black, rolling waves, dimly seen. Chilled to the bone, for neither could bear to stay within the hut, they had grown silent and almost despairing, when Rex suddenly started to his feet, and, pricking up his ears, looked intently towards the great floe beside them, which had now approached much nearer. Then, after listening a moment, he uttered a loud bark, and bounded off. The two castaways followed to the edge of the ice, and there, having silenced Rex, could presently hear a faint halloo—her brother's voice!

“Halloo! halloo-o!” they shrieked back.

“Let us get the boat, and go after them!” cried Katy, nearly wild with joy and excitement.

“Can't do it,” said Tug, in a discouraged tone. “All four of us couldn't budge that boat and sledge before morning. It is frozen in, and has got to be chopped out and dried up. Must do something besides get the boat.”

"That floe is nearer than it has been before, Tug. Maybe it'll come quite close."

"Yes, mebbe it will. I 'low that's our only hope. We can do nothing, Katy, but watch, and—and pray, Katy. Let us go back to the fire. It is cold here, and we can do no good. Once in a while I'll come down and scream across to cheer 'em up."

Reluctantly, therefore, they returned to the igloo, warmed their feet, and picked up something to eat, but did not go to bed. Tug and Rex would frequently run out and shout across to Aleck, reporting at each return that the water-space (as well as could be guessed in the darkness) seemed to be surely narrowing. Towards morning Katy was persuaded to lie down, consenting to do so only when promised that she should be roused as soon as daylight appeared. Tug himself fell asleep, but both awoke with the first light of dawn, and hastened together to the edge of the floe, where the water lay calm and smooth, gray as iron and cold as death, between the divided friends.

"Oh, I can see them!" cried the girl, and sent a cheery call across the "lead," which had now narrowed to a few rods. "Poor little Jim! See how he has to lean against Aleck."

"We're safe," came back the shout, "but almost worn-out. Can you move the boat?"

"No."

"Then unroll the ball of twine, and tie one end of it to the clothes-line, and to the other end of the clothes-line knot all the drag-ropes put together. Then fasten the loose end of the twine to Rex's collar, and make the dog bring it to me. Understand?"

"Yes."

But Tug didn't quite understand. He was off too soon, in his haste to get the twine and clothes-line and ropes. Aleck hadn't finished his directions.

"Tell Tug," he shouted again to Katy, "to bring the sled, and fasten that to the drag-ropes. When I have hauled the ropes across, and got hold of the sled, I'll send Rex back, and you can pull in the twine, and catch the ropes, and tow us across. Hurry up, if you want us alive! This ice may drift apart again."

In five minutes Tug came running back, with all his preparations made. Now everything depended upon Rex. The twine was slipped through his collar, and securely knotted, Katy kneeling the while with her arms about his shaggy head, whispering to him what he was to do. Then, in a stern voice, Tug commanded:

"Go, Rex—go to Aleck!" at the same time pushing him into the water, while the Captain coaxed from the other side, and even Jim roused himself at this joyful prospect of deliverance.

At first the dog, brave as he was, turned back, whining pitifully at the freezing water. But they fought him away, and finally poor Rex struck out and swam across to where Aleck was anxiously waiting to lift him out. Taking hold of the twine the dog had brought, the Captain reeled it in as rapidly as his stiffened fingers would let him, until the clothes-line began to come, and after it the heavier drag-ropes.

But both clothes-line and drag-ropes together proved too short to reach quite across, and the floes seemed to have stopped their approach to each other, so that waiting would be useless, if not dangerous.

"There is about ten feet lacking," Aleck shouted. "You must find some more rope."

"Can't do it, unless I cut it off the mainsail."

"Cut it off, then, and make haste."

Tug went off on a run, and another five minutes passed by before he got back. Already the canal had begun to widen, so that fifteen feet instead of ten would be required.

Tossing the rope into the sled-box, Tug screamed, "All right!" and the captain began drawing the sled to his side as quickly as possible, so that the two parties were again disconnected, and wholly reliant upon the nervous and frightened dog, which Jim was holding firmly, and coaxing into quiet. Swiftly splicing the rope with the new

“REX STRUCK OUT AND SWAM ACROSS.”



piece, the dog was let go. This time he leaped eagerly into the water for his return trip, apparently feeling perfectly the responsibility laid upon him, though perhaps he was only frightened, and eager to get back to what seemed home.

Positions were now reversed. Aleck and Jim had the sled—Tug and Katy the twine. Drawing this in, all waited with feverish anxiety to see if there would be length of rope enough. There was; but so rapidly had the floes drifted apart that Tug held the very end of the taut line in his outstretched hand, and had not a bit to spare. One minute more, and the lines would not have reached across.

Then they saw Aleck snatch off his overcoat, his undercoat, and his boots, and put them into the box of the sled, which was floating unsteadily at the margin of the ice. They saw him half lift the exhausted Jim, helping him to get into the box, and then heard him call out in quick words:

“Don’t try to pull at all hard until you can catch the big rope. I am going to swim and push a little ways, but I expect I shall be too chilled to do more than a little. When I stop pushing, and you get hold of the drag-ropes, haul us both ashore as fast as you can. Here goes!”

With these words he slid into the water, swimming with his right hand, while with his left he pushed along the box and sled, which was half sunken, and in which Jimmy crouched, shaking with cold, but afraid to stir.

"Keep it up a little longer!" Tug sung out, as he knelt on the edge of the ice, and carefully gathered in the clothes-line until he could almost clutch the end of the stronger rope. "I've almost got it! About two strokes more! All right! Now hold on with both arms, and we'll soon have you." Whereupon Katy seized the rope with him, and both together pulled as hard and as fast as they knew how.

The strange little ferry-boat and its passengers seemed to approach very slowly, but finally it came so near that Tug stopped hauling on the line, and knelt down in order to lean out and grasp the box after Katy should have pulled it a few inches closer. Jim, seeing this motion, forgot how delicate was the balance, and rose up, when in an instant the unsteady craft tipped, and the boy went backward into and under the blue lake. At any rate, so it seemed to the spectators; but the little fellow, making a despairing clutch as he went over, had gripped a runner of the sled, and a second later his face appeared close by the ice, where the fond sister, pale as he, seized his arm and helped him scramble out.

CHAPTER XIX.

ADrift ON AN ICE RAFT.

MEANWHILE Aleck, startled by the upset of the sled and Jim's disappearance, had let go of his support. Now, seeing Jim safe, he was trying to regain it, when suddenly Tug saw him throw up his hand and sink out of sight.

Tug knew what that meant, and that there was not an instant to spare. Tearing off his coat—he had thrown aside his overcoat in the heat of the work before—he watched till he saw Aleck rising through the clear water, then dashed in, followed by the noble dog, and grasped his hair. Aleck hung in his hold a dead weight, as though life had gone; but Tug knew that the fatal end had not come yet, and that this was only the fainting of utter exhaustion and the cramping paralysis of cold. Cold! Tug had felt the dreadful chill striking through and through him the instant he had touched the water. Already it was clogging his motions and overcoming his strength with a fearful numbness that would fast render him powerless. And Aleck had been in that stiffening, paralyzing flood several minutes!

All this went through Tug's mind, as on a dark night a

flash of lightning enters and leaves the pupil of the eye; it took "no time at all," and the instant he had hooked his fingers in Aleck's hair he shouted to Katy to shove out the sled where he might reach it. She did so, and by it drew both the lads to the ice, the brave rescuer grasping the friendly box and towing his senseless Captain.

Then a new difficulty presented itself. Aleck was perfectly helpless, and like a log in the water; or worse than that, for he would sink if Tug loosed his hold. How should they get him out?

Katy saw this problem, and said to Tug, as soon as the ice had been reached, while she knelt at the brink of the splashing water:

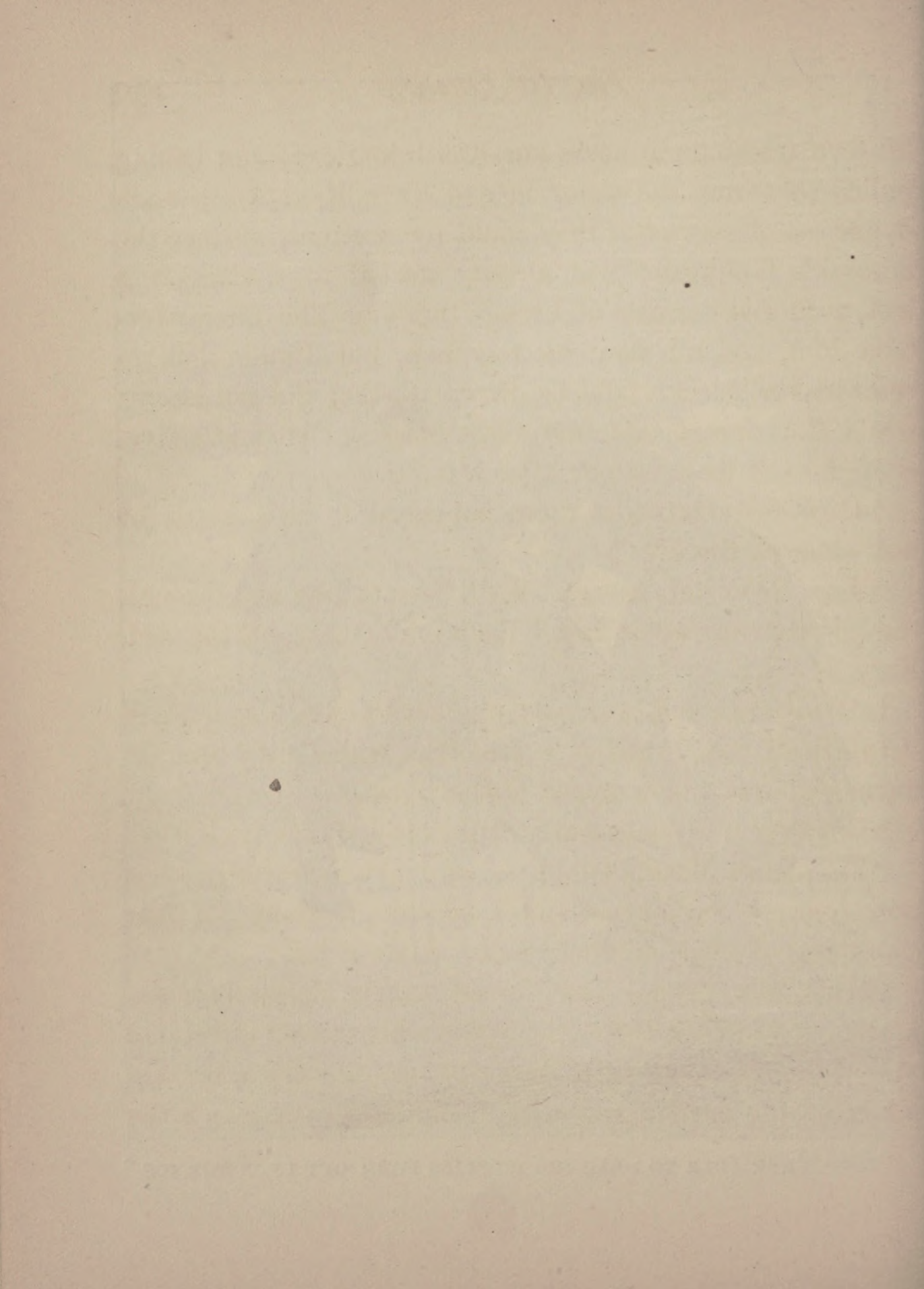
"Let me hold his head up — I can do it — until you can climb out; then both of us together, I guess, can drag him up on to the ice. Oh dear! will he ever come to?"

Her tears blinded her eyes, but she dashed them away, and took firm hold upon Aleck's collar, while Tug scrambled out. Then, while Katy held his head above the curling, gurgling little waves that the wind was chasing, Tug slipped one end of the rope under Aleck's arms, and made a loop about his body, by which they were able to drag his lifeless form out upon the ice, as though he were a fish or a seal.

"Now let's have the sled!" screamed Tug, minding neither



“THEY WERE ABLE TO DRAG HIS LIFELESS FORM OUT UPON THE ICE.”



his own freezing garments nor Katy's anguish; and having pulled this from the water, he and Katy lifted Aleck upon it, and set off as fast as they could for the tent, whither the miserable Youngster had already started in a staggering trot, with many groans and rough tumbles. The others overtook him, and all went on together; but Jimkin got no comfort, for Aleck might be drowned—they did not know; while Jim, though certainly miserable, was alive and active, enough so, at least, to look after himself.

“How fortunate that there happened to be a kettle of hot water on the fire!”

“Yes. Now here we are. We'll have to drag him through the low doorway heels first. Help me lift him off the sled, Katy.”

Laid on straw and overcoats by the warm fire, Tug quickly stripped off the Captain's wet clothes, while Katy brought warm blankets, and wrapped him in them.

“Didn't you say you had a little bottle of brandy, Katy?”

“Yes; Miss Marshall told us we ought never to go on a long journey without it, and I brought it along for fear something like this might happen. Here it is.”

Taking the bottle, Tug forced a few drops between Aleck's lips and saw them trickle down his throat. A minute later there was a stronger throb of the fluttering heart, a quiver of the eyelids, and a faint, sighing groan, which the

anxious watchers could just hear. At this sign of returning life they rose and grasped each other's hands. The tears Katy had so bravely kept back when she had had work to do and no time to cry came now in an unrestrained shower; but they were tears of joy, for the Captain was waking up all right.

Now poor little Jim got some attention, and Katy left them to themselves while the three boys helped each other to get rid of their icy clothes and crawl into the blankets and warm straw of their bedrooms, as they called the hull of the boat. This done, Katy came back and made hot tea for her three tucked-up patients, which so revived them that Tug and Jim begged to be allowed to get up as soon as their clothes had been dried; but Aleck said he wanted to sleep two weeks, and so would stay in bed a little longer.

As for Rex, whose heroism in bringing back Aleck's floating coat, when he was unable to aid his drowning master himself, had been forgotten until now, he was content to lie in a snug corner and wait for the half-frozen fish his mistress had promised him should presently be the reward of his faithfulness.

That eventful day came to an end without anything further to disturb their peace. Aleck rose towards evening, and went out fishing with Jim and Tug, catching two or three pickerel. The night passed in unusual quiet, for the

wind, though steady, was not a whistling gale, nor did the grinding roar of moving ice come to their ears, as it had sometimes during the previous daytime.

In the morning the same clouds were overhead, the same vague haze hid the horizon, the same waste of ice and water surrounded their lonely camp, the same quiet breeze breathed steadily across the lake, and, but for occasional noises of their own making, the whole world seemed profoundly still. This was depressing, and the spirits of each one of our young adventurers sank to a level with the flat ice and the dull gray sky; yet it was evident that nothing could be done except to wait as patiently as possible for some change.

"If yez can't be aisy, be as aisy as ye can," remarked Tug, quoting an excellent Irish rule of life under adverse circumstances; but the pleasantry met with only a faint smile from his disheartened companions. All thought that any *active* perils would be better than this motionless, objectless gloom, so threatening because so still and uncertain.

"I wonder if we haven't stopped drifting," said Katy, as they were pretending to eat a bit of luncheon, for which nobody had much appetite; and, more for the sake of doing something than because it seemed to make much difference whether they had come to a standstill or not, they took a few chips to the edge of the floe, and threw them into the water. These tossed up and down on the gentle waves,

but did not change their position at all, so our navigators concluded their floe to be at last stationary.

“How far do you think we have drifted?” Jim asked his brother.

“Well,” Aleck replied, “I’ve been studying over that. We don’t know just when we started nor exactly when we stopped—if we have stopped—nor whether we have gone steadily on. I have seen something of drifting ice, and I should say we had gone probably between twenty and twenty-five miles, all right out into the middle of the lake.”

“Then you have some idea of where we are?”

“Oh, yes; that’s quite easily calculated by ‘dead-reckoning,’ as sailors say.”

The west wind now began to subside, and before long the air became still and the mists thicker, with dense, low clouds massing close overhead. On land it must have been a warm, thawing day. Out here it was always chilly, but the four persons were not uncomfortable, even when their overcoats were unbuttoned, partly, however, because they had become accustomed to constant exposure.

Before the sun went down the air grew much cooler, and the fog thinned out, while the wind freshened and worked around until it blew briskly and very cold from the north. This soon swept away the mists, but not the clouds; yet light enough remained just before dusk to give Aleck a brief look

to the northward. He could see a great field of rough ice, apparently made up of broken pieces crushed and jammed together, stretching in that direction to the horizon. This horizon was broken in one place, however, by a darker patch, that looked as though it might be land; but before he could examine it more carefully it had become lost in the darkness.

Returning to the house, the Captain ordered every preparation to be made for a possible removal. While Katy cooked their evening meal, the boys worked with axe and shovel until they had freed the runners under the boat, so that she could be dragged away quickly. Then the wall was taken down, and the boxes stowed carefully. Several of them had been emptied during the long halt, and it made the lads feel very grave to notice how low their stock of provisions and lamp-oil had run. Jimmy refused to see the use of all this hard work when everything seemed as safe as ever it was, and Aleck confessed that he had no better reason for his precautions than that the weather had changed, and it was best to be on the safe side—in which he showed himself a good commander.

“We won’t take the tent down, Jim, nor throw in the mess kit, nor roll away our good beds, till we find we have to; but, if the ice should drop from under our feet at this moment, we could scramble into the boat, and have our necessary property with us.”

Katy, meanwhile, had set half a ham boiling—they had only one more left after this—and was only waiting for it to be done before going to bed, for it was late in the evening, and much colder than usual, since the hummock no longer sheltered them from this new wind, which blew in under the boat where the snow had been shovelled away, and threatened to tear the frail hut to pieces. Finally the ham was done, and the girl crept shivering to Jim's side amid the straw and quilts, thoroughly frightened and weary.

She had not been there five minutes when there came a quick series of crashing reports, such as she had heard before. The ice was breaking up again. Tug was quickest to jump out, calling to all to stay in the boat till he came back. They could feel the ice shake and tip under them—or, at any rate, imagined they could—while the wind was blowing snow-flakes in their scared faces. It seemed an age, though really it was hardly a minute, before Tug came back and said they were afloat upon a small piece—a piece only a few yards square.

“Then,” said Aleck, decisively, “we must take to the boat and get off this cake, for the wind is blowing us right back into the open lake, and we couldn't live out there. I think I saw land just north of us, and we must try to reach it, or, at any rate, to get upon the big ice-field in front. It's our only hope.”

He and Tug were buttoning their overcoats and tying tippets about their heads and necks, but talking at the same time.

“Now for our orders, Captain.”

“Well, then, listen. Katy and Jim must not step out of the boat unless I say so. They must light the lantern, ship the rudder, roll up the bedding and stow it under the thwarts, and fix everything as snug as they can. Jim’s place will be forward; Katy will stay by the tiller; and remember, whatever happens, that the compass direction is due north. Now, Tug,” he continued, “you and I will throw this kitchen stuff aboard, and let The Youngster pack it away the best he can. Then, down with the oars and mast and canvas. We must hurry.”

So saying, he snatched the kettle, ham and all, from the fire, and tossed it into the boat, where it lit on Jim’s foot, and was greeted with an angry howl. The other goods and the spare canvas followed. Then they began to tear down the roof, and in five minutes this had been piled in a stiff, frozen heap on the bow of the boat, for they thought there would be no time to bend and fold it into shape. It was all the united efforts of the four could do to hoist it over the low gunwale.

All these preparations took perhaps fifteen minutes—a quarter of an hour of terror, for now the great cake was plain-

ly rocking under their feet. Then calling Jim out of the boat to help them, the three put their heads through the collars of the drag-ropes, and tried their best to move the boat, but it wouldn't budge an inch.

"We must throw off that icy canvas. I should think it weighs a hundred pounds," Tug remarked.

"Yes, off with it!" ordered Captain Aleck.

This done, they tried again, and slowly and laboriously worked the boat twenty or thirty paces towards the edge of the ice, when it became clogged with the fast-falling snow, and could be pushed no farther.

CHAPTER XX.

A NIGHT IN AN OPEN BOAT.

WHAT should be done? Aleck was sure that their only chance for life lay in getting the boat afloat; but unless it could be brought nearer the edge this could not be done, and perhaps it was impossible, anyway. Yet to stay where they were meant destruction. Katy and Jim climbed into the boat, and crouched down out of the snow, while the larger lads stood outside trying to find some way out of their desperate situation. They must think fast; minutes were precious; but, cudgel their brains as they might, only darkness, a howling snow-squall, and crashing blocks of ice greeted their eyes or thoughts. One minute passed, two minutes passed, yet they could see no way to help themselves. The third minute was slipping by, when a huge ice-cake crowded its resistless way underneath the rear edge of their own raft, towards which the stern of the boat was pointing, and slowly lifted it above the level of the water.

At once the sledge began to feel this inclination, and started to move forward.

“Jump in !” shouted Aleck, and leaped aboard, with Tug beside him. “Try to steady her !” they heard him cry, and each seized an oar, or a boat-hook, or whatever was nearest. But it was of little use. Slowly but gently the hinder part of the ice-cake rose, and the front part tipped down. As the slant deepened, the speed of the sliding boat increased, until it went with a rush, and struck the water with a plunging splash that would surely have swamped them had it not been for the tight half-deck forward ; this shed the water, and caused the little craft to rise upon an even keel as soon as she had fairly left the surface of the ice. It was evident in an instant, however, that she would sink in a very short time unless freed of the great sledge that was dragging upon her bottom. Already the water was pouring over her sides, and Aleck knew that they were in imminent danger of sinking or capsizing, or both. Tug had leaped in forward, and to him Aleck shouted, “Cut those bands !”

“Haven’t any knife.”

“Here’s the hatchet. Hurry up !”

One stroke of Tug’s arm parted one of the bands, and he raised his hatchet for the second one, for there were two straps forward. As it descended, Aleck drew his pocket-knife across the strained band astern, which parted with a loud ripping noise. The idea was that both straps should be severed at the same instant ; but in the darkness Tug

“TRY TO STEADY HER!”



partly missed his aim, and the poor boat, held to the sledge by a single strap, began to yaw and jerk and ship water in a most alarming manner—a strain she could not have borne one moment had not the half-cut band of canvas broken, setting the boat free. Aleck had intended to hold to the strap and take the sledge aboard; but this struggle, which came so near wrecking them all, wrenched it out of his hand, and the first wave washed the bobs beyond recovery—a loss whose full force did not strike them at once, for they had too much else to think of.

The weight and awkwardness of the sledge having been taken away, the boat rode much more lightly in the face of the ice-clogged sea, and showed how stanch and trim she really was, though much cold water splashed over her rails.

“Now,” said Aleck, cheerfully, though it was fortunate the darkness could conceal how anxious was the expression of his face, “now we shall get along. Jim, get out your oars (the stroke); and look out for floating ice forward, Tug. Katy, my little steersman, are you very, very cold?”

“N-n-n-o!” the girl answered, bravely, but her teeth chattered dreadfully.

“Better say you are, for you can’t hide it, poor child. Wait a minute till I get this strap off my roll of bedding, and I will wrap a blanket around you.”

Doubling a large blanket, he put it carefully over her

head and shoulders like an immense hood. Then he buckled around her the strap which had held the roll together, leaving only a fold out of which she might grasp the tiller, and another crevice through which to peep and breathe.

"We've got to have that lantern lit, because you must see the compass."

Taking some matches from his pocket, he knelt down, placed the lantern under the skirt of Katy's blanket robe, crouched over it as close as he could, and struck a match. It went out. A second fizzed a while, which only warmed the wicking, but at the third the oil in the wick took fire, and the lantern was soon shining gayly into the bright face of the compass at Katy's feet.

"Now, Youngster, for the oars. Lie low, and let me crawl over you to my seat."

Aleck got there and was ready, but Jim was still fumbling about on each side, and feeling under the thwart.

"What's the matter? Why don't you go to work?"

"Can't find but one oar."

"Only one oar? Sure?"

Then the two searched, but to no purpose. It had been dropped overboard, evidently, during the excitement about losing the sledge.

"Well, Jim, it's your fault, but it can't be helped now. You take this quilt, and cuddle down as close to Katy as

you can get, and try to keep each other warm. I'll row alone. Ready, forward?"

"Ay, ay, sir."

Then they began to move ahead through the water, which came in long rollers, not in breaking waves, because there was so much ice around them that the wind could not get hold of it. It was very cold. Occasionally Tug would fend away a cake of ice, or they would stop and steer clear of a big piece; but pretty soon he called out in a shaky voice that he was too stiff to stand there any longer, where the spray was blowing over him, and that he should be good for nothing in a few minutes unless he could row awhile to get warm. So Aleck took his place, fixing the spare canvas into a kind of shield to keep off the spattering drops. It was very forlorn and miserable, and to say that all wished themselves back on shore would be but the faintest expression of their distress.

Little was said. Pushing their way slowly through the cakes of ice, which had grown denser now; changing every little while from oars to boat-hook and back again, while Katy, protected from freezing by her double blanket and Jim's close hugging, kept the yawl's head due north; fighting fatigue, hunger, cold, and a great desire to sleep, these brave boys worked hour after hour for their lives and the lives in their care.

When they were beginning to think it almost morning they came squarely against a field of ice which stretched right and left into the darkness farther than it was possible to see. Whether this was the edge of a stationary field or only a large raft they couldn't tell; but they were too exhausted to go farther, and they decided to tie up and wait for daylight. Tug struck his hook into the ice until it held firmly, then lashed it to the bow. Aleck also stepped out and drove one of the short railway spikes into the ice near the stern, around which a rope was hitched. Then both the boys opened a second roll of bedding, and snuggled down as well as they could to get what rest they were able to while waiting for sunrise. Crowded together in the straw (though it was damp with snow), and covered with quilts and blankets, they could keep tolerably warm, and even caught little naps. The snow had stopped now, and the stars began to appear, first in the north, then overhead, then gradually everywhere. The wind still blew, but the boat rose and fell more and more slowly upon the rollers, until at last it stood perfectly still. This happened so suddenly, and was followed by so complete steadiness, that it aroused Tug's curiosity. Poking his head from under the covering, he said, "I think we are frozen in." Nobody answered him, for they were asleep, or too stupid to care; but the gray daylight which came at last showed that he was

right. On their right hand was a great sheet of new, thin ice; on their left a mass of thick old ice, white with snow. Straight ahead, so well had Katy steered, towered the rocks and trees of a high, wooded shore, coming momentarily into greater and greater distinctness as the red streamers of the morning shot higher and higher into the eastern sky.

Tug was the first to catch this sight, and roused his fellows with a shout:

“Land!—land! Hurrah!”

CHAPTER XXI.

THE ESCAPE TO THE SHORE.

To rouse themselves, hastily gather a few eatables, and make their way ashore had been the work of a very short time, though done with great soreness and much hobbling, after their cramped-up night in the boat.

They halted on the south side of a sheltering rock, where the sun was beginning to shine against the gray stone. Katy hated to confess it, but really she was very, very tired, and was quite willing to let Aleck wrap her up in a thick blanket, and to lie quietly in a sunny nook of the rock while the boys set a fire crackling as near to her as was safe, and began to heat water for coffee. The mill had been forgotten, but Tug had a piece of buckskin in his overcoat pocket, and folding the grains in this they crushed them between two stones, which did just as well as grinding them.

This done, the coffee-pot was filled and set upon the embers, and a moment later four cups were steaming with the hot, reviving liquid, and four tired hands were reaching towards the little heap of slices cut from the boiled ham which had been tossed into the boat the night before, when leaving the

ice-raft. It had required all of Rex's strength of mind to keep his paws off these tempting pieces for some time past.

"Poor dog!" cried Jim; "we must give you something, if we are pretty short. Pity there was no fish left for you."

"He can have my slice of ham," Katy said, with a faint smile. "I can't eat it, somehow."

"Better try to eat a little, sis," Aleck said, "because—"

"Don't you touch a mouthful!" exclaimed Tug, snatching the shaving from her hand and tossing it to the dog, which swallowed it at a gulp. "Just you wait a minute! I ought to go and kick myself for not thinking of it before!" And with this puzzling remark he rushed off over the ice.

They saw him rummage about the cargo, and then start back, bringing his gun and a small package.

"Thought it would be just as well to make sure of the gun," he remarked, as he rejoined them; "and here's something, Katy, you can eat, I guess!" It was a box containing two dozen preserved figs that he opened, and handed to her. "I bought 'em just before we left Monore," he said, "and clean forgot 'em till now—sure as I'm a Dutchman!"

"Oh, give me one!" cried Jim.

"Jim Kincaid," said Tug, sternly, springing between the boy and Katy's hand, outstretched in generosity, "if you touch one of those figs I'll thump you well! I didn't bring them all this way for a lubber like you to eat!" And

in spite of all the girl's protests, Tug would not touch a fig himself nor allow her to give one to anybody else.

Aleck grinned, and munched his tough morsel; Jim scowled, and gnawed at his shavings as though he enjoyed viciously tearing them into shreds; Tug thought his beef was juicy and sweet, as he saw with what gusto poor Katy ate her fruit; and as for Rex, he dug his teeth into the tough remnant of the dried shank which had been given to him, as though he never expected to see another meal.

Refreshed and strengthened by their breakfast, meagre as it was, the boys prepared to begin the work of bringing the cargo ashore, though the weather was so cold that a thermometer would have marked nearly down to zero.

Aleck forbade Katy to help, so she curled up beside the wall of rock, which acted as a sort of oven to hold the warmth, where presently she fell asleep, and the boys, when they returned with their first sled-load of goods, were careful not to awaken her. So much had their stock been reduced that they found a second trip would enable them to bring everything of consequence ashore by carrying pretty large armfuls. They therefore distributed their loads as best they could, and started back from the abandoned boat, slipping and stumbling over the rough ice and through the cutting wind.

CHAPTER XXII.

REX FIGHTS UNKNOWN ENEMIES.

WITH aching heads bowed under their burdens, and tired limbs, they had returned to within, perhaps, a hundred yards of the beach, when the barking of dogs, mingled with a girlish scream, caused them all to look up in astonishment. Then, without waiting for any one to give the word, each dropped what he was carrying, and began to run as fast as he was able over the broken ice towards the shore.

When the lads had started on the second trip out to the boat, Rex, bidden to watch his mistress, and proud of the duty, had lain down almost on the edge of her blankets. There was no snow upon the sand here, and the warmth of the fire closed the eyes of the fagged-out dog, just as it had those of his mistress. The boys had been gone, perhaps, half an hour, and he had had time to get very soundly asleep, when, suddenly, he was roused by a growl and a rush, and before he could rise to his feet two animals were right upon him, each nearly as big as himself, though short-haired and wofully gaunt. With a yelp of surprise and rage the dog sprang up and tried to defend himself, but the

attack of his assailants was so fierce that he was rolled over in an instant, and felt their teeth pressing at his throat.

Into Katy's dreams of a May-day picnic under the blossoming apple-trees broke this rude hubbub, and before she could understand its meaning she felt the weight of the struggling animals pressing upon her bed. With the piercing scream of fright that had reached the ears of her brothers out on the ice, she struggled out of her blankets, only to be tripped and fall right upon the tumbling, growling, fighting heap. Afterwards she used to tell the story with merry laughter, but then, scarcely knowing what it all meant, she was too frightened to do anything but scream again, and pick herself up as best she could.

Safely on her feet at last, and convinced that this startling adventure was a reality and not some frightful change in her dream, she saw that Rex was being overpowered by two great dogs, lean almost as skeletons, that seemed bent upon killing him without an instant's delay. To see her faithful friend surprised and overcome in this terrible way stirred up all her sympathies and all her wrath. Like a flash she remembered how African travellers had fought lions with firebrands, and, seizing one of the charred sticks from the fire, she began to strike the brute nearest to her.

But what followed was most alarming, for the animal, at the very first blow, left Rex and turned towards her, his

jaws wide open, and his haggard eyes glowing with rage. Instinctively she presented the smoking end of her long brand, as a soldier would his bayonet, and was fortunate enough to meet the dog squarely in the face, which staggered him for an instant, and before he could gather himself for a new attack Aleck and Tug and Jim were all beside her, and the two great brutes were in full flight

Then the brave girl dropped her firebrand, and sank down on the nearest seat, where, perhaps, she might have been excused for fainting had the day been warm, instead of freezing cold. The boys gathered anxiously about her, with such questions as, "Where did they come from?" "Why did they attack you?" "Are you hurt?" and so on.

The story was soon told, and this was fortunate, for everybody had forgotten poor Rex, who lay panting, and licking one of his feet, from which the blood was oozing.

"Well, old fellow," exclaimed Tug, as he went and bent over the dog, "did they try to chew you up? Here, give us your paw. Quiet! Let me feel—so—good dog! No bones broken, I guess, and we'll bandage you up O. K. How about this ear? One hole through it, and— Well, 'twas lucky you had a strong collar? Just look at the tooth-marks on that piece of leather! If it hadn't been for that an' his thick hair, they'd been in his throat, and then good-bye, Rex!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

EXPLORING THE ISLAND.

WHEN all the property of our shipwrecked crew had been brought ashore it made a very small heap, and the biggest part of that seemed to be the bedding. Everybody noticed this, and it added a new gloom to the feeling of discouragement caused by their weariness, by Katy's fright, and, most of all, by the hunger of which their slight breakfast had only taken away the edge.

"Before we do anything else at all," said Captain Aleck, "we must have something more to eat. Do you feel strong enough to help us, Katy?"

"Oh, yes, indeed. I've got quite rid of my foolish weakness."

"That's good. Let us know if we can help you."

Nobody felt in the mood for talking, and Jim really took a nap between the rock and the fire. Though the air was still cold, the sunshine was bright, and under the lee of the little cliff it was very comfortable; but poor Katy had hard work to keep her fingers from almost freezing. What she made was chocolate, fried bacon, and "griddle" cakes, the

last cooked in the skillet, and consuming every bit of buckwheat flour and a good share of the sugar. When the meal had been eaten to the last scrap, and everybody had grown wide awake and cheerful, Aleck rapped on a box, and made a speech :

“Attention, ladies and gentlemen! Though none of us have said much about it, you all know well enough that we’re in a regular scrape, and the sooner we discover how we’re to get out of it the better. Now, I am going to propose a plan, and if any of you don’t like it you can say so.”

“We’ll do whatever you say,” exclaimed Tug.

“But I don’t want to *say* till we’ve talked it over. I rather think we’re on a small island a good many miles from land. I judge so from what I know of the chart of the lake, and what I can guess of where we drifted on that ice-floe. If so, I do not think anybody lives here, or ever comes here in winter.”

“Regular desert island!” Jim was heard to mutter, in a tone that showed his mind busy with the romantic memory of Robinson Crusoe.

“The first thing to do is to find out whether this is so or not. Now I propose that Jim and Katy should stay here—”

“Oh, no, no,” Katy interrupted, in an eager appeal. “Those dreadful dogs might come back, and Jimmy is so

little! I want you to stay with me, or else let me go with you."

"That's rather rough on the boy," Aleck laughed. "However, I suppose it won't matter. Well, then, Tug, I think you and Jim had better go back in the country, and see what you can find, while I stay and watch over the goods and the sister. What do you say?"

"Good plan," Tug replied. "I'm ready. Are you, Youngster?"

"Yes, siree! But you'll let us take the gun, won't you, Aleck?"

"Oh, yes, you can have the gun. If the dogs, or wolves, or whatever they are, come at us while you're gone, Katy can fight them with firebrands, and I—"

"Oh, *you* can climb a tree!" said his sister, merrily.

"Yes, I can climb a tree."

While Tug and Jim were gone, Aleck and Katy busied themselves in repacking their goods in snug bundles, and in talking over their strange adventures. They were too anxious to feel very gay, but thought it foolish to give way to fretting until they had lost all hope. Two hours or more elapsed, and the sun had climbed to "high noon" in the sky, before the explorers came back, bringing solemn faces.

"Island!" both called out as soon as they came near; "and a small one at that."

"Any people on it?" asked Katy.

"Not a soul that I could see," Tug said. "I allow they come here in summer, though, for the trees have been cut down, and there's a rough little shanty on the other side."

"Could we live in it?"

"Didn't go inside; don't know. It's half full of snow. Better than no shelter at all, I suppose. It ain't far off. Suppose you all go over there and look at it—Jim can show you where it is—while I guard the grub against those pesky dogs. I don't wonder the brutes are savage, for I don't see how they could get anything to eat here."

When the three had left the rocks at the beach, under Jim's guidance, they found themselves in a brushy wood consisting largely of hemlocks and pines, often closely matted together. A few minutes' walking carried them through this and up to a ridge of jagged limestone rocks, one point of which, a little distance off, stood up like a big monument. This ridge ran about east and west, and they had come up its southern side. Its northern face was very snowy, had few trees, and sloped down an eighth of a mile to the water.

At one place on this northern beach several great rocks rose from the water's edge, and among them stood a small grove of hemlocks and other trees. In that thicket, Jimmy told them, the old shanty was placed. They thought it must be very small, or else well stowed away, for they

could see nothing of it. To get down to it was no easy task, for the crevices and holes in the rocky hillside had drifted full of snow, and they were continually sinking in where they had expected to stand firm, or finding a solid rock ahead when they tried to flounder out. It was a chilled and ill-tempered trio that finally reached the beach, and sought the shelter of the thicket.

Now it became easier to understand why the hut had been invisible from above, for it was only a shanty propped up between two great rocks that helped to form its walls and support its roof. From the broken oars and many fragments of nets, the old corks and other rubbish lying about, they saw at once that it had been built by fishermen, who probably came there to spend the night now and then, or, perhaps, stayed a week or so at a time in the summer.

The door stood half open, and a snowdrift lay heaped upon the threshold. Edging their way in, they found that the roof and walls were tight, the little window unbroken, and several rough articles of furniture lying about. An old, rusty stove, one corner propped up on stones, and the pipe tumbled down, stood against the chimney of mud and sticks that was built up against one of the rocky walls.

"This is splendid!" Katy cried. "Just look at that dear old stove!"

"Yes, sis; I think we must move over here. But are you



THE CABIN ON THE ISLAND.

sure, Jim—how did you find out?—that this is an island, and not the mainland?”

“From the top of that high point of rocks you can see the whole of it. I don’t believe it is more than a mile up to the farther end, and not half that down to the other. The island is shaped something like a dumb-bell, only one end is a good deal bigger than the other. We are on the little end here.”

“Well, Youngster, you’re quite a geographer; but we can’t stop to talk about it now. Let’s go back as quickly as we can, and bring part of our goods over this afternoon; don’t you think that’s best?”

“Oh, yes.” And twenty minutes later, rosy and panting, Katy astonished the sleepy Tug by rushing into camp, followed closely, not by wild beasts, as he thought would be the case, but by both the brothers she had outsped.

“It’s so good!” she exclaimed, catching her breath, “to feel something besides slippery ice under your feet! Now, what shall we take first?”

By hard work and little resting the coming of twilight found them established in their new home. The last journey had been made after the bedding, by Tug and Aleck, while Jim and Katy cleared the snow all away from the cabin door and off the bending roof, straightened up the rickety old stove, and set a fire going. By the time the

larger boys came back, raising a whoop far up the hillside as they saw the smoke curling up between the hemlocks, the old hut was warm, and the tin cover of the little iron pot was dancing, in its effort to hold back the escaping steam.

"Ugh!" said Tug, as he pushed the door open and threw down his bundle of blankets; "I'm as hungry as a wolf!"

"If you think you can wait fifteen minutes, Mr. Montgomery, you'll have a bee-yutiful supper. Can you do it?"

"I 'low I can. I ain't a epi—epi— What d'ye call it?"

"Epicure?"

"That's the chap. I read the other day that the Tartars say he digs his grave with his teeth. I don't want a grave as bad as that yet."

"I suppose that means that a man who lives on too rich food will die by it."

"Yes, I reckon so. But I 'low there's no danger in our case; eh, Aleck? Do you think dried beef and snow-birds too rich for your delicate stomach, my boy?"

That night all bunked down on the floor, for they were too weary to care much for anything but a chance to sleep, and the sun was high before any of them found out, in their shady house, that it was morning. When breakfast was ready, and they had all sat down at the rough shelf-table

which the fishermen had fastened at one side of the cabin, Aleck called "Attention!" and said that it was time they were looking the situation squarely in the face.

"It's all very funny," he said, "to think ourselves Crusoes, and feel that we are all right because we have a roof over us and a stove to keep warm by. But Crusoe didn't need a roof nor a stove, for he was in a warm climate; and he had goats and birds, and shell-fish along the rocks, and cocoanuts, and lots of other things. Crusoe was a king in his palace beside us."

The circle of faces grew rather grave.

"Here we are, in midwinter, on an island in a fresh-water lake—and not even water, but solid ice—where there are no oysters nor clams, no fruit-trees, and no animals—"

"Except those dogs," Jim interrupted.

"Even *they* seem to have disappeared," Aleck went on; "and they are starved almost to skin and bone. If a pack of dogs can't get anything to eat, what are we four going to do? I tell you, it's a serious case."

"Well," Tug rejoined, stoutly, "I, for one, don't give in yet. Look what we did out on the ice! We can fish, and trap snow-birds—I saw a flock last evening; and maybe we can find some mussels near the beach, and so stick it out till the ice breaks up and the birds begin to come in the spring."

"Tug, you're a brick, and I was wrong to feel so low-

spirited," said Aleck, heartily. "I think you're a better fellow to be captain here than I am. I resign."

"Not by a long chalk!" exclaimed Tug. "Here, I'll put it to vote. Whoever wants Aleck to go out, and me to take my innings as captain, hold up his hand."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE WILD DOGS AGAIN.

ALECK's hand alone was shown; and though he held both of his arms as high as he could, the other side had the majority, and would not accept his resignation.

"Suppose we see just exactly what we have in the way of provisions," Katy suggested. "It won't take long to make out the list," she added, with a grim little smile.

They began at once, and the small housewife wrote down the list as fast as the stores were examined, guessing at the weights. There were found about eleven pounds of dried beef; bacon, one "side;" flour, about six pounds; corn-meal, ten pounds; beans, three pounds; coffee, two pounds; tea, a quarter of a pound; chocolate, half a cake; sugar, three pounds; small quantities of salt, pepper, soda, and so on; some crumbs of crackers and cookies in the bottom of a bag; a small piece of dried yeast; and a few swallows of the brandy that had been so useful at the time of Aleck's accident on the drifting ice.

They had nearly all the bedding, cooking utensils, and tools with which they had started three weeks before; but

the oil for their lantern and their matches were nearly used up or lost; their powder was low, for part of it had been spoiled by water; their clothes were badly worn; and their only canvas, since the loss of their tent, was the small "spare piece."

"It's plain," said Aleck, as this overhauling was finished, "that we must put ourselves upon a regular allowance. The provisions won't last us a week unless we save them carefully."

"And it's plain that we must raise some more, so I reckon I'd better get to work at bird-traps."

"Yes, the sooner the better. As for me, I want to learn all I can about the island. There may be something of use to us at the other end, so I shall take a long walk, and see what I can find."

"Mayn't I go with you?" Jim asked, eagerly.

"Yes, Youngster, if you think you can stand it."

"No trouble about that," replied the little fellow, courageously. He had grown very manly during the past month.

The brothers started off, taking the gun with them, and saying that they would be back about three o'clock.

As soon as they had gone Tug set about his traps in one corner of the house, behind the stove, while Katy went to work to make the hut a little more homelike.

The cabin was about twelve feet square, and one side was the smooth face of a great rock, against which was heaped the rude chimney of mud and stones. In front of this the stove was placed, and behind it, on the side of the room farthest from the door, the fishermen had built a bunk.

"You must call that your bedroom," Tug said, and he helped Katy to set up in front of it poles sustaining a curtain made of a shawl.

"Now," said the lad, when this had been arranged, "you must have a mattress."

So, taking the axe, he went out, and soon came back with a great armful of hemlock boughs, and then a second one, with which he heaped the bunk, laying them all very smoothly, and making a delightful bed.

"I'm thinkin' we'll have to fix some more bunks for ourselves," said the boy, as he tried this springy couch. "That's a heap better 'n the soft side of a plank."

Then with a hemlock broom Katy swept the floor, and spread down the canvas as a carpet. Finding in her little trunk some clothing wrapped in an old *Harper's Weekly*, she cut out the pictures and tacked them up, and finally she washed the grimy window to let more light in, so that the rough little house soon came to look quite warm and cosey.

Meanwhile Tug, getting out his few tools, had made the

triggers of half a dozen such box-traps as they had caught snow-birds with when living on the ice, and one other queer little arrangement, of sticks delicately balanced, an upright one in the middle bearing at its top a bit of red rag:

"What in the world is *that*?" Katy inquired with much curiosity.

"Oh, it's a bit of a contrivance to stand over a hole in the ice where I propose to place a 'set' line for fish—that is, you know, a line that I bait and leave set for a while, trusting to luck to catch something. The minute a fish gets the hook through his lips and begins to flop around, he will set this flag a-fluttering and so let me know it. I might make him ring a little bell if I had one."

"I should say," Katy remarked laughingly, "that to make a captured and dying fish ring his own funeral knell was adding insult to injury."

At length Tug pulled on his overcoat and announced that he was going to look for a good fishing-place.

He was gone nearly an hour, during which Katy busied herself in mending her sadly torn dress, and in thinking. But the latter was by no means a pleasant occupation, and she was glad to see Tug come back, rubbing his ears, for the day was a cold one.

"I think I have found a real likely place for fishing," he told her. "There is a little cove the other side of this

thicket, with a marsh around it, and a pretty narrow entrance. I reckon the water's deep enough in there for fish to be skulking, and I dropped my line right in the middle. I set the traps near here, but didn't see any birds."

"Do you think—" Katy stopped suddenly, laying one hand on Tug's arm, and holding up the other warningly, while her face grew pale. Rex, who had been lying by the stove quietly licking his injured paw, rose up and growled deeply.

"There! Did you not hear it?"

"I did. It's them pesky dogs," cried Tug, and hurried to the window, while Rex began to bark furiously. "There are the boys on the hill backing down, and two—no, three—dogs following them. Where's that axe? I'll fix 'em!"

And before Katy could quite understand what was the matter, the boy had burst out, and was tearing up the hill to the support of his friends. Rex wanted to go too, but Katy held him fast, as she stood watching the boys flourishing their weapons, and frightening the dogs back, while they slowly retreated. As they came nearer to the house the animals ceased pursuing, and relieved their disappointment by savage barks and prolonged howls.

"Well," exclaimed Tug, in the country speech he always used when excited, "I allow them curs are the most or'nary critters I ever see!"

"They followed us all the way from the other side of the neck," said Jim, dropping limp into a broken-legged chair, which tumbled him over backward.

"Where did you go, and what did you see?" was Katy's anxious question, choking down her laughter at the plaintive Youngster's accident.

Aleck then told them that from the highest point of the hill he could study the whole island, which was everywhere surrounded by ice, and that eastward he could see what he thought was another island several miles away; but that to the southward it was too misty for a long sight. Going on down the hill, they crossed a neck or isthmus of sand and rocks between two marshy bays, and entered some woods, which seemed to cover pretty much all the rest of the island. Pushing through this, and gathering a good many dried grapes, which were worth a hungry man's attention if he had plenty of time, they reached the shore somewhere near the farther end of the island without finding any signs that anybody had ever been there before. On the shore, however, by a cove, they found a tumbled-down shanty, and a little clearing where once had been a camp. They were going on still farther, when suddenly they were attacked by the three dogs, and thought it best to retreat. The dogs followed, and they had to fight them off all the way.

"One of them was a giant of a mastiff," said Aleck,



ATTACKED BY THE DOGS.

“and we were more afraid of him than of the smaller ones, which seemed to be two well-grown pups. I think these dogs must have been left here last summer by somebody. There seems to be four of them altogether—two old ones and two young ones—though we have never seen more than three at once. How they have managed to live beats me. I don’t see anything for them to eat. I wish you had some bullets, Tug. We never can hurt ’em much with small shot.”

“They’ll steal everything from the traps, too,” Jim piped in. “By the way, Tug, have you set any yet?”

Then Tug told what he had been doing, and said he must go before it became dark and see if anything had been taken. So, wrapping himself up, he took the gun and went off, while Aleck and Jim gathered a supply of wood for the night, and Katy began to get supper. By the time this was ready, and the red glare of a threatening sunset had tinged the snow and suffused the clouds with crimson, Tug came back, bringing nothing at all. It was not a very merry party, therefore, that sat around the table that evening listening to the doleful cries of the outcast dogs, which still kept watch on the hillside.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE PERILS OF A MIDNIGHT SEARCH.

THE next morning snow was falling, and the wind was blowing furiously.

"This ought to bring us some small birds, and maybe an owl or two," said Tug, as he watched the dense clouds of snow hurled along from the northern waste of ice.

"Do you think you would dare to go out to the traps, or could find them in this gale?" Aleck asked.

"I reckon so; and while I'm gone you take the gun and see if you can't find snow-birds among the hemlocks."

"What'll you do if those dogs get after you? They're perfectly savage with hunger. It don't take much wildness or long famine to turn a dog back to a wolf, and we've got to look out for these curs as if they were wild beasts."

"You're right," Tug assented. "But I hardly think they'll be out on the ice in this storm; you are more likely to meet them in the woods. At any rate, we must have something to eat, and it's my business to tend those traps, wolves or no wolves. If I go under, why, there's one less mouth to feed."

So Tug and Aleck went away into the storm, one out upon the wide white desert, the other wading up the drifted slopes to the woods.

Katy and Jim stayed at home, sitting comfortably in the house. She was reading aloud from an old newspaper they had found lying in a corner, when there came plainly to her ears the twittering of small birds.

"Listen, Jimkin. Did you hear that?"

"Snow-birds!" the boy exclaimed. "Right on the roof, too, and nary a trap!"

"Let us go out," said Katy, eagerly. "Perhaps we could catch one or two somehow."

So they crept out, and saw that the thick hemlock growing beside the big rock was covered with small birds. Some were hiding away from the "cauld blast" in the nooks between the dense branches; some were hanging upon the little cones, swinging and clinging like acrobats; some were taking short flights through the smoke to warm their toes, or sitting on the bare rock near the top of the chimney. They were of two kinds, but all equally happy and unconcerned.

"If I only had the gun I could knock over about twenty at once," Jim whispered. "I believe I could even kill a lot with my pea-shooter."

"Could you? Well, Jimkin, I've got some strong rub-

ber cord in my trunk, and you might make one of those horrid forked-stick things."

"That's a splendid idea, Katy. Get your rubber, and I'll cut a stick. Hurry up!"

Ten minutes afterwards the weapon was ready. But now it occurred to Jim that he had no "peas" for his "shooter." So he and Katy both hurried down to where they knew there was a bit of beach not covered by ice. They scraped away the new snow, and raked up double handfuls of small pebbles.

Jim's hands grew so cold during this operation that he had to go in and warm them before he could handle his "rubber gun." But the birds still stayed in the trees, as is their custom when a heavy snow-storm is raging, and the excited young hunter waited only long enough to get the stiffest of his fingers into decent shape.

Creeping around to the rear side of the rock, he climbed slowly up until he could peer over the edge, and found himself not more than a dozen feet away from the little feathered group sitting by the chimney-top. Taking the best of aim, and pulling the rubber as far back as it would go, he let fly, and one of the largest of the birds tumbled over the edge. The boy had hard work to refrain from shouting with pride at this early success, though he wasn't sure he had killed the bird.

CHAPTER XXVI.

FINDING SNOW-BIRDS AND LOSING THE CAPTAIN.

JIM knew he must keep quiet, so he stood like a statue, trying to forget his stinging ears, until the flock had recovered from its surprise, when he knocked over a second bird.

It was slow and very cold work, but the boy stuck to it bravely until his fingers became so stiff that he could not manage his little weapon, and then he crept down to the stove, to dance about and wring his hands with pain as the heat of the room set them aching.

As soon as possible he went out again—missed twice and hit once. Just as he was taking aim a fourth time his foot slipped, and he tumbled backwards, followed by a small avalanche, which half buried him at the foot of the rock. When he picked himself up, every feather had disappeared.

Running round to the front, he found two dead birds and three wounded ones, whose necks were speedily wrung. Never was a boy prouder than this young sportsman, as he laid his trophies in a row and admired them.

“What a delicious broth they will make!” cried Katy, who longed to taste something really good.

"I'm hungry enough to eat 'em raw, like an Indian. Oh, Tug, look what I've shot!" Jim added, as his friend opened the door and stood shaking off the snow.

"Good for you! I've got nothin' 'cept a mighty good appetite. Why, they're cross-bills and red-polls!"

"What are *they*?"

"Birds that come down in winter from away up north. This little streaked sparrow-like fellow, with the rosy breast and the red cap, is the red-poll; they say he never breeds south of Greenland. Now look at these larger ones—see how strong the bills are, and how their points cross! That's so they can twist the hard scales off the cones and get at the seeds."

"Yes," said Jim; "they were hanging upside down and every way on the cones, and I could hardly see them to take aim."

"That's 'cause their plumage is such a vague sort of red and green, so near the color of the leaves and scales on those evergreen trees. The hawks and owls can't see 'em, either, half as well as if they were bright, and that's where the little fellows have the advantage of their big enemies. Did you notice any other kinds?"

"There was one different one, a little larger than any of these, that I caught a glimpse of—it was green, just like the hemlock leaves, and kept inside out of the storm—"

"Like a sensible bird, eh? Correct! I guess he was a pine grosbeak."

"That means 'pine *big*beak' doesn't it? It ought to, for this fellow had a beak twice as thick as any bird I ever saw, except a cardinal from South Carolina that a man had in a cage last summer. Do you think they'll come back?"

"I reckon so. None of these winter birds are shy—lucky for us! and I think the shelter of these trees and the warmth of our smoke will fetch 'em, especially if we scatter some crumbs out on the roof."

"But we have none to scatter," Katy protested.

All three then went to work picking the birds, whose bodies looked surprisingly small after their puffy coats had been taken off. "See what a warm undershirt of down this one wears at the roots of his feathers!" Tug pointed out, holding up a red-poll.

"Wish I were a bird," said Jimmy; "I'd get out o' this in no time."

"Perhaps if you were, this would be the very place you would most want to come to and stay in," Katy remarked, "just as these poor little things did. The 'if' makes a lot of difference, Master Jim."

By this time it began to grow dusk, and though the snow was falling as fast as ever, the air had grown much warmer, as though the storm would end in rain. Aleck had not

come yet, and the three, in their snug house, looking out upon the deep drifts and the clouded air, and listening to the melancholy sound of the wind in the trees, became more and more anxious for his appearance.

When it had grown quite dark, and the broth Katy had made was ready, together with cakes of corn-meal, and tea, or, rather, hot water flavored with tea and sugar—the best meal they had seen for many a day—Tug said that if the Captain did not come before they got through eating he would go and look for him. So they tried to keep up each other's spirits; but when the meal was done, and still no brother appeared, all their merriment faded.

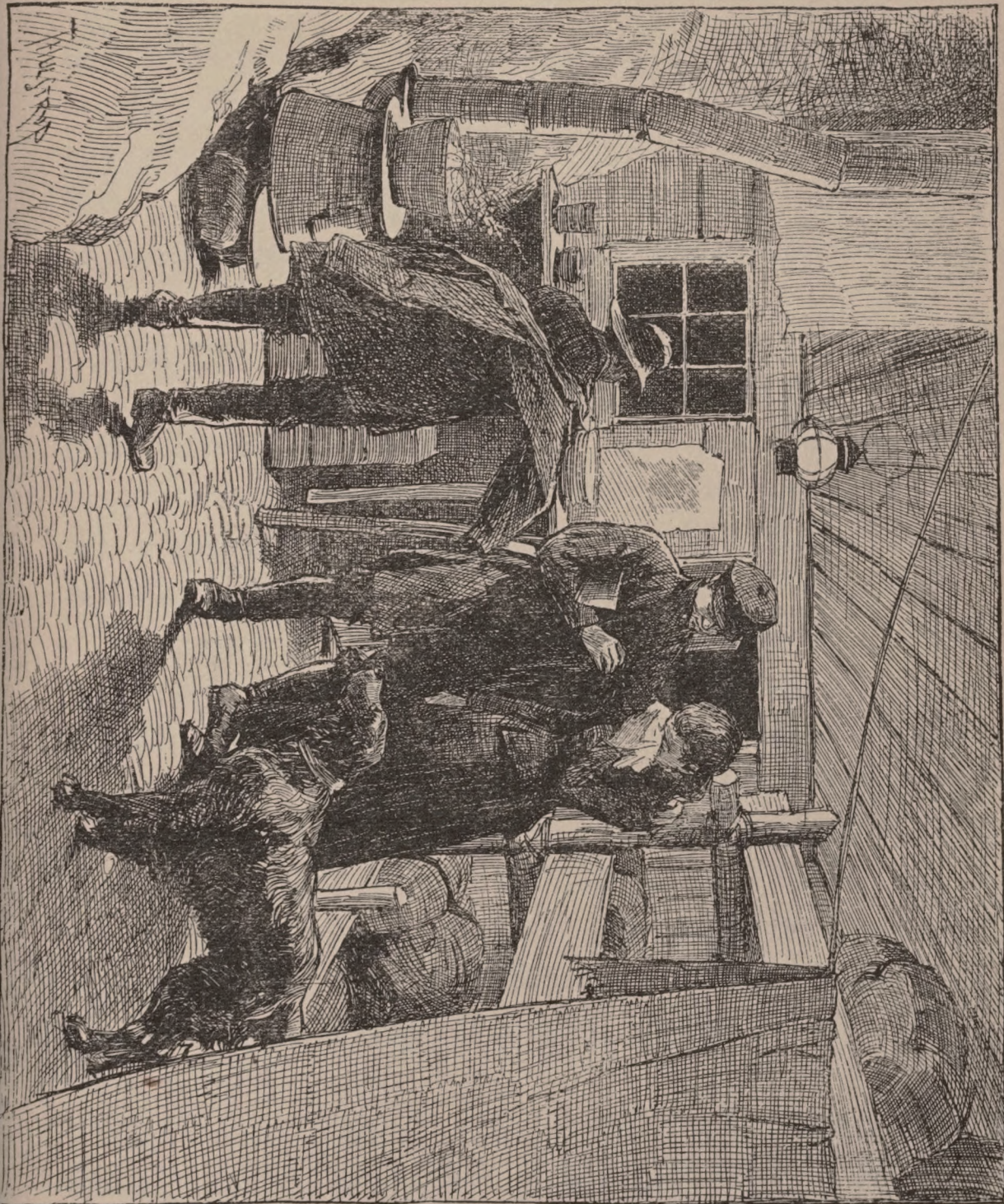
“Jim and Rex ought both to go with you, Tug; and you must take along the lantern, and these extra corn cakes I have baked, and some bacon—”

“The bacon's raw,” Jim protested.

“Well, stupid, you could fry it over some coals on the end of a stick, couldn't you?” exclaimed Tug, impatiently. He was getting very tired of Jim's constant objections.

“And you must take this little bit of brandy, because you know, he might—might be—”

“Now, Katy, dear Katy,” said Tug, his own eyes moist, as he threw his arm around the shoulders of the girl, who had broken down at last, and was crying bitterly. “Don't cry,



Katy. If *you* give in, what are we goin' to do? You are the life of the party, and there ain't nothin' we wouldn't any of us—and specially me—do for you. Really now, Katy— Here, you young cub, what are *you* bellerin' about? If I catch you crying round here again, discouragin' your sister in this style, I'll thrash you well!"

Tug was thoroughly excited and distressed by this last and heaviest trouble, and most anxious of all to make the rest believe he wasn't anxious. As usual, when excited, he dropped into the slang he had been striving to forget. But this added force to his speeches, for when it occurred everybody understood that he was very much in earnest.

"I knew a young fellow," Tug himself used to say, when laughed at for this peculiarity, "whose father was a Dutchman, but who could never be persuaded to learn that language. 'Why not?' we used to ask him. 'Well, fellows,' he would say, 'my daddy talks English till he catches me up to some mischief; then he begins to talk Dutch, and goes for his whip; so I've got a terrible distaste for Dutch.' It's with me as it was with that man. When I am mad, or mean business, I'm pretty likely to talk in the 'Dutch' I learned when I was a boy."

The two boys and the dog—for Rex had nursed his foot until it was of use to him again, protected by bandages—bundled themselves up, took the lantern, the hatchet, and

luncheon, and started out. Katy said she should not be a bit afraid, and would keep up a good fire. As they disappeared, letting in a flurry of snow before they could shut the door, she dropped into a seat (if truth must be told) to finish her crying. Let her do it, poor girl!—few of her associates, or yours, my pretty maiden, ever had better cause. We will flounder along with Tug and Jim, who are bowing their faces to the storm, and toiling up the dark and treacherous hillside.

When the top of the ridge had been gained they paused to get breath and to shout Aleck's name. No reply came, and they pushed on down to the isthmus, where the snow, which was becoming more and more sleety, swept about their faces with double force. In a few moments, however, they reached the shelter of the woods, which covered pretty much the whole of that part of the island; and then came the question whether it would be better to work along the beach or plunge into the woods.

There seemed very small chance of success, in the midst of this darkness and storm, either way, but they felt sure that some accident had happened to the Captain, and they were eager to help him. After talking it over, they decided upon the right-hand or southern shore of the island, because that was to leeward, and better sheltered, and marched on as rapidly as they could. They had no strength to talk, but

hand-in-hand pushed ahead, stopping now and then to shout, but never getting an answer.

"There's one good thing about this storm," Tug remarked, after a while, as they halted to rest in a sort of cleft in the rock. "Those confounded dogs will be likely to stay indoors and not bother us."

"I wonder where they keep themselves at night?"

"If our island is like the rest, this limestone rock is full of caves. There's no telling, for instance, how deep this here opening we're sitting in goes back; and in some of the Puddin' Bay [Put-in-Bay] islands big caves have been explored that people go away into to see the stalactites. There are plenty of rocky holes, therefore, where they could find good shelter and beds of leaves that the wind had blown in. But we must get out of this, Youngster."

CHAPTER XXVII.

ANOTHER ENCOUNTER WITH THE WILD DOGS.

THEY trudged slowly on again until they thought they must be close to the farther end of the island, when they found progress interrupted by a low headland of rocks partly covered by the brush of a fallen tree-top. In trying to get past it they became entangled in the branches, and Tug said he "’lowed they’d have to light the lantern."

With great care, therefore—for matches were precious—this was done, and its rays at once showed them that they were not the first persons who had been there that night. Branches were freshly broken, and the snow was trampled. They set up a combined shout (and bark) as soon as this was perceived, but nothing came back except the dull echo of their voices and the rustle of the sleet and snow among the leafless and dripping branches.

"Well," said Tug, when he realized this, "our cue is to follow the tracks anyhow."

Crushing through the branches, they saw that the tracks, which had approached from the other side of the rocks and

brush, led them to the trunk of the tree, and that then Aleck (if, indeed, it were he who had made them) had walked along the trunk towards its roots. Of course they followed, Tug going ahead with the lantern; but when they arrived at the great base of upturned roots they could not see where Aleck had leaped off, or that he had leaped off at all. On one side the snow lay smooth and untouched; on the other, close under and around the mass of dead roots, was a little thicket of low bushes and a shoulder of black rock. Beyond these the snow had not been disturbed.

This was very mysterious, and chilled their hearts with a nameless fear. They came close together on the high log, and talked almost in whispers. Jim held Tug's arm with both hands, and trembled so that his teeth chattered, and the tears rolled down his cheeks; while Tug himself, old and brave and strong as he was, was so scared (as he often said afterwards) that every creak and moan of the laboring, ice-coated trees seemed a frightful voice, and all the flitting lights and shadows cast by their lantern among the dark trunks and swaying hemlock branches took on shapes that it chilled his blood to look at. Even Rex seemed to catch the panic, and cowered at their feet with bristling hair.

There had been only a moment of this helpless, causeless terror—and no doubt they would quickly have thrown it off—when they were roused by a real danger, which they

knew in an instant. All ghosts and goblins, forms and voices, vanished at once, for they heard the wolfish howl of the dreaded dogs.

"Only mastiffs or hounds," you may exclaim, "such as we pass on the street every day, and babies play with, rolling over and on them unharmed!"

Very true; but these dogs had become savage again by their wild life; and no traveller in his sledge on the steppes of Siberia, or postman belated in the Black Forest at New Year, was ever in more danger from wolves than were these two lads from the dogs, if the animals chose to attack them. Perhaps they had not yet been quite long enough in the wilderness to have overcome their once well-learned fear of men, and so would hesitate to attack, in open fight, the beings that heretofore had been their masters; but this was all the hope the boys could have.

"The dogs!" cried Jim, in a hoarse whisper.

"Yes," said Tug, through his teeth. "Here! give me the lantern, quick: we must have a fire."

The tangle of dead roots was quite dry, and kindled easily when the lantern-candle was held against it, so that it was scarcely a minute before a bright blaze was crackling.

That moment had been enough, however, for the near approach of the dogs, as they knew by the increasing loud-

ness of their cries, to which Rex bravely responded; and it was not long before they heard them crashing through the underbrush, and saw their eyes—fiery pairs of dots which reflected the firelight in flashes of green or red—though the forms of the savage animals were hidden in the gloom.

Tug had hastily lopped off a young sapling and trimmed it into a long, rough club, which he now held in the fire, in hope that the green wood would get hardened, or perhaps even ablaze. Jimmy clutched the hatchet tightly in his right hand, and his open jackknife in his left, while Rex bristled and barked. All the goblin fright had vanished, and the boys no longer trembled because sleet and wind made uncanny noises, or the firelight seemed to summon eldritch forms from the aisles of darkness between the hemlocks.

There seemed to be three of the fierce brutes, and they stopped as they came in sight of the fire and the group ready to receive them; but after a short pause the largest dog, with a tremendous bark, rushed forward, the others following savagely at his heels. Rex was crouching and ready, so that before either of the boys could seize his collar he had sprung to meet his foes, and had gone down under their combined weight.

It was one of the strangest dog-fights known to history,

and had the strangest end. In his broad collar, his long hair, and his greater health the Newfoundland had the advantage; but he was one and his foes were three, and they had no chivalrous ideas of fairness or mercy in a fight, but were savages, bent not only upon the death of their victim, but upon tearing him in pieces and devouring him afterwards.

No sooner did Tug see Rex leap, and perceive the charge upon him, than he shouted "Give it to 'em!" and sprang into the snow, punching the nearest brute, bayonet fashion, with the hot tip of his sapling spear, while Jim got in at least one good blow with his hatchet. It sank almost to the haft in the neck of one of the youngest dogs, and he dropped dead with scarcely a shudder.

Meeting this unexpected resistance, so determined, fiery (Tug's sapling bore a little streamer of flame, like the banner on the head of a Cossack's lance), and so fatal to one of their number, the two remaining dogs were abashed, and let go of Rex, intending to fight with their human assailants. But they had no time to make the change. Seeing that he must follow up his advantage, Tug charged again, and fairly put the startled brutes to flight by the combined force of his yells and his blazing bayonet, backed by Jim and his terrible hatchet.

When the boys saw that the dogs had really run away,

they turned to look after their own brave ally, but he was nowhere to be seen, though the blazing stump lit up the whole scene of the battle.

"Why, where's Rex?" they asked one another, and called and whistled. Could he have fled into the forest? Impossible. Hark! was not that a faint whine?—and another?

"Do you think he can be dying, and has hid himself in the brush?" asked Jim. "They say wounded animals do do that."

"Looks like it," Tug admitted. "Here, *Rex*!"

A more distinct yelp, as though the dog was in pain, came to their ears, and they began to search in all the shadowy places.

"Poke up the fire a bit, Jimmy—let's have a little more light."

Jim hastened to follow out this suggestion, and in doing so entered the little thicket which I have mentioned between the shoulder of rock and the log. Suddenly he pitched almost headlong into a dark hollow. He drew back hastily, but as he did so, parting the bushes, he heard Rex's yelping come plainly up, as though from beneath the sod.

"Hello! Rex has fallen down a hole," he exclaimed. "Come here, Tug!"

Sure enough, there was the mouth of a pit, how deep

they could not tell, though they could see the Newfoundland's eyes shining at what did not seem so very great a distance.

"Why, Rex, old fellow, are you hurt?" they called out; and the dog answered by a short bark, which ended in a pitiful whine of pain.

"Get the lantern, Jim; we must try to see what kind of a place this is; and look out where you step. This is a cave country, as I told you awhile ago. You may fall through 'most anywhere in this darkness."

The lantern was brought, and tied on the end of a pole, with a handkerchief. Rex began to utter a series of peculiarly short, sharp barks when he saw the light descending, and they knew he was dancing about by the way his eyes moved.

When about twelve feet of the pole had been lowered the lantern rested, and they knew the bottom had been reached. By its faint glow Rex could be seen standing on his legs, apparently not much hurt.

"There's something else down there that Rex seems to bother himself about a good deal," reported Jim, who was lying down and peering over the edge. "Move the lantern this way a little. It looks— Oh, Tug, it's a man!—it's Aleck, and he's dead!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE ACCIDENT EXPLAINED.

How to get down into the pit was now the great question. Guided by the light of the fire, steadily eating its way into the butt of the log in spite of the storm, they cut down a small tree and lopped off its branches in such a way as to make a rude ladder. Though they were in so great a hurry, this was slow work with their dull hatchet. Lowering it carefully into the pit until its end rested firmly, Jim held the top, while Tug went down, took the lantern, and approached the motionless form, whose face Rex was licking. The instant the light fell upon the face he saw that it was the Captain's.

"It *is* Aleck!" he called out. "Come down."

"Is he dead?" asked Jim, as he scrambled down the break-neck ladder.

"No," said Tug, who was kneeling by the lad's side. "His face is warm, and I can feel his heart beat. He's only stunned. Where's that brandy Katy sent?"

"It's in my overcoat pocket up on the ground—I'll get

it." And Jim scrambled up the hemlock trunk, fearless of a tumble.

"Now pour a few drops between his lips," said Tug, when the boy had got back, at the same time lifting Aleck's head upon his knee. "Oh, if only we had some water! Get out!"

This last was addressed to Rex, who was in the way; but it also answered the boy's prayer, for, in starting back, the dog stepped into a pool of water that lay upon the bottom of the cave. So crystal clear and quiet was this little pool in the lone and silent chamber of rock, that even when they knew it was there, and were dipping the water up with their hats, they could not tell by lantern-light where its edge was, or how near were their hands to the surface before they felt its icy chill against their knuckles.

The dashing of this cold, pure water upon his face, and a few drops of the spirits, served to awaken Aleck very speedily, though at first his ideas were much confused.

"Where am I?" was his first utterance, as it has been that of thousands of others in like case; and several minutes passed before he was able to sit up and talk to them.

"I suppose—you fellows—" he began to say, presently, in a stammering sort of way, "would like—to know—what I'm doing—down here."

"Well, Captain," said Tug, who would have liked to



“‘IS HE DEAD?’ ASKED JIM.”

dance a jig, but was afraid to, and could only hug the dog to express his joy—"well, Captain, we don't want to be impertinent, Jim and me, nor what you might call *inquisitive*, in regard to what ain't none o' our business; and we hope we're not intrudin' on you here; but if you are willing to explain one or two matters, we'd be glad to listen."

"Why, I—got so tired—tramping round in the storm—that when I got to that brush-heap—and rocks—out there, I thought—I thought—I'd go up in the woods—and camp. So I came up along that big log, and stepped off—and that's the last I remember. But I know I've a frightful headache, and I wish I was home."

Home! Where? In Monore? That roof was sheltering other heads. In Cleveland? That seemed farther away than ever. The fisherman's cottage? Ah, Katy would make *that* a home to the wounded lad, if only they could get him there!

"Do you think you could walk?" Tug asked, anxiously.

"Yes, if I was out of this, and could get warm."

"Well, there is a fire up there, and this ladder is not long. Drink the rest of this brandy: I know you hate it, but it's only a trifle, and it will give you strength for your climb; and then you can rest a bit, while we get the dog out. Here, Rex!"

To do this, Tug went half-way up the ladder, and Jim

handed up their shaggy companion, after which Tug lifted him to where he could scramble out.

Then Aleck, by slow stages and with much help, reached the top, and was wrapped in overcoats, while he sat by the fire until his chilliness was gone, and he had eaten some of the food Katy had sent. This done, he felt able to begin his journey homeward. Meanwhile, Tug went into the pit to bring out Aleck's gun and the lantern. Standing on the brink of the black water, he tossed a pebble, but failed to strike the opposite wall. Then he hurled another with all his strength, and, after a time, heard it splash in the water. How far away lay the other end of the cave, or to what depths underneath this cavern-lake the cave-floor descended, he never knew. He realized how narrow had been the escape of all, and the strange coincidence by which they had been led to this spot, and had discovered the hidden mouth of the pit; and he thanked God, who had preserved their lives.

The dull gray of the dawn was lighting up the driving rain, the slushy snow, and the drenched and dripping trees, when the weary boys, supporting their almost worn-out leader, crept down the rough hill, and approached the little cottage. Katy had seen them coming, and stood waiting in the door, looking herself as though she had not slept much that sad night.

"Oh, Aleck!" was all she could say, as she threw her arms around her brother's neck, "must you always be the one to get hurt for us?"

"I hope not, sis," he said, with a smile, and sank, exhausted, into a bunk.

Then with quiet swiftness the girl heated water, washed the wounds in Aleck's head, and hastened to boil the corn-meal mush and the coffee, which formed the best breakfast she was able to give. Meanwhile she told how she had passed the night, making her story so bright, and bustling about so cheerily, that she did more to restore the tired boys than, in her absence, all their pulling off of soaked boots and stretching upon soft mattresses of springy boughs would have done.

"After waiting a long, long time—it must have been until after midnight," Katy began the story of her night, "I had dropped asleep in my chair before the fire, when I was waked up by something scratching at the door. I knew in a minute it was those dreadful dogs, and I was awfully scared."

"After we beat them off they must have come directly here," Tug remarked. "Were there more than two?"

"No, but two were quite enough," Katy replied; and then continued her narrative:

"I should have liked to have got under the bed, only

there wasn't any bed, and so I—what do you suppose? —I got the butcher-knife and a big stick, and climbed up into the top berth. They growled and grumbled around the door, and scratched and butted at it, and every little while one or both of them would stand upon their hind-legs and look in at the window with their horrible green eyes. Ugh! I don't want to go through another such a night!"

"Nor I!" exclaimed all three of her listeners, in chorus, each thinking of his own separate experience.

"Passed unanimously!" cried Katy. "Now come to breakfast."

CHAPTER XXIX.

DECIDING UPON A NEW MOVE.

THE warm rain continued all that day and the next night, while the boys rested, except that Tug went to his set-lines and brought back a fine pike of about six pounds' weight, which gave them a good dinner. By the next morning the snow had nearly all melted away, and the sun shone warm, while great glistening pools of water lay spread out upon the ice. It was evident that the long-delayed January thaw had come at last.

The disappearance of the snow brought several things to light that they had not seen before. Bits of iron and general rubbish appeared about the door. A heap of snow which they had thought concealed a boulder, exposed by its melting an old flat-bottomed skiff, turned upside down, and under it lay a torn sail, with its mast. Behind the house Tug found several articles he thought "might come handy;" among the rest a short piece of lead pipe, which he seized upon at once. Then, while Aleck and Jimmy walked out to look at the traps, Tug built a hot fire, and went to work at making bullets of the lead. He melted his old pipe in a

piece of tin, which he had hammered into a spoon, and dropped the molten metal into cold water. The bullets, or shot, were not all of the same size, and were more pear-shaped than round; but by whittling and hammering they did very well, and in two hours he had a handful.

"Now," said he, with a vengeful tone in his voice, "just let me get a shot at those or'nary curs!"

Later, Aleck came back, reporting no birds, but bringing a small pickerel.

"But I saw another flock of cross-bills, and I'm going to take my 'pitchfork' and go after them," Jimmy added, eagerly; and at once went out, while Katy put on her hat and started for a short walk.

"Aleck," said Tug, when they were alone, "I have wanted a good chance to talk with you about the fix we're in. I feel sure that, snug as we are, it's no good to stay here."

"How are we going to get away? Our boat is useless for ice travel, now that the sledge is gone, even if we save her in decent condition, which we must see about this afternoon."

"I have been looking at that little scow down on the shore. She is big enough to carry us in water, and I believe we could put a couple of low runners on her bottom, so as to move over an ice-field. Come with me and have a look at her."

So the two lads went down to the old boat, and looked her carefully over, discussing all the repairs she would need, and how they could be made.

"But why don't you think we could stay here longer?" Aleck asked, after a time.

"Because," his companion replied, "we have almost no ammunition and almost no fishing-tackle. In a week from now we should have to live wholly on what we could catch in fishing and by traps, and we get so little now that I think it foolish to risk it if we can get a chance to escape. I reckon it'll freeze up hard again in a few days, but for the last time this winter. Probably the ice'll break up so badly next time it thaws that we couldn't sledge on it; and after that, you know, come the long, stormy months of spring, when, if we tried sailing, our boat wouldn't keep afloat with four people in it during a journey across the lake. If we can't get away over the ice before the next break-up, I believe we're goners."

"It can't be very far to the mainland; but the weather has always been so thick I never could see far southward," Aleck remarked.

"It's clear to-day," said Tug. "Let's go and take a look."

Inspired with hope, the two comrades, forgetful of everything else, hastened up the hillside, and soon reached the pinnacle of rocks that formed their lookout.

The air was clear, the sky cloudless, and the first glance southward showed them, faint upon the low horizon, yet distinct enough to be unmistakable, the long, dark line of the mainland. Between them and it all lay white, mixed with blue—a plain of ice covered with thin patches of rain-water. They could not see more than eight or ten miles; but in no direction except on the northern horizon (towards the centre of the lake) was there any sign of open water. They hoped, and this helped them to believe, that between them and the shore lay an unbroken plain of ice.

“If that is so,” said Aleck, “and it will only come on cold before it snows, we could skate right across.”

“Take us a couple of days, you’ll find,” Tug replied.

“Pshaw! it can’t be more than twenty miles.”

“Yes, but we’re not so strong as we were when we started. We’ve none of us really had a square meal for a fortnight, and some of us have been knocked on the head, you know, and that don’t help a man any.”

“At any rate, it will be best to get ready right away.”

“That’s my ticket,” Tug replied. “By the way, can we see the *Red Erik*? Oh, yes, there she is—all right, I reckon.”

“Yes, she appears to be.”

CHAPTER XXX.

KATY TAMES THE WILD DOGS.

WHEN half-way down the hill on their return they saw Katy, who had been at the beach, wave her handkerchief, and turn to come and meet them. At the same instant they caught sight of wolfish figures stealing along among the rocks and bushes at the base.

“The wild dogs!” both exclaimed, in the same breath, and both felt their blood stop flowing for an instant, for in a minute or two more Katy would meet the brutes, and she must do so before they could get there to help her. They shouted to her, as they hurried at neck-breaking speed down the rough ledges; but she did not hear or did not understand them, and then they lost sight of both her and the dogs behind some bushes. A moment later they saw her again, but with what surprise!

The girl stood in the middle of a smooth, grassy plat, facing the three dogs, which were gathered in a group, the father of the family in front, and only a few feet from her. All were silent, and the big one was stretching his neck forward, as if debating whether he dared lead his mate and

the pup any closer. Katy caught a glimpse of the boys, and quickly raised her right hand, as though signing to them not to advance; but she never took her eye off the animals, nor ceased to speak to them in coaxing tones, while she held out her left hand beckoning them to come nearer. Thus far this had had no effect. The big leader could not make up his mind to trust her, though as yet he showed no disposition to attack.

“What shall we do?” Aleck whispered to Tug, in an agony of suspense. “She can’t keep that up long. Let us rush in.”

“All right,” Tug whispered back; “but we must get a stone or a club! ’Twon’t do to go at ’em naked-handed.”

Clubs were not handy, but each took heavy stones in both hands, and began a stealthy advance. At that same instant they saw the foremost dog begin to wag his tail slowly, while, one by one, as it were, the hairs upon the back of his neck were lowered. The lads halted, and watched the scene with astonishment and anxiety. Katy still spoke coaxingly, and at last took a gentle step forward. The dog, though suspicious, still wagged his tail. She quietly walked backward three or four steps, and sat down upon a boulder—an act which the lesser dogs behind at once imitated. “Good dog! fine fellow! come here; come, Tiger,” she said, over and over, changing the name every

time in hopes of hitting some one that might have been this mastiff's before he was an outcast. Finally, as she sat there with her eyes steadily on his, and beginning to feel very tired, the animal's big square face suggested a picture she had seen of a German prince, just then beginning to become famous.

"Why, Bismarck!" she called out, in confident tones, "don't you know me? and don't you want a bone? Good old Bismarck!"

She knew instantly that she had hit it. The dog dropped his ears and hung his head, walked slowly up, and laid his great muzzle, big as a tiger's almost, in her lap, while slowly and suspiciously his followers came nearer and nearer to her by slow advances.

"Well, I vum!" muttered Tug, in utter amazement, while Aleck was too astounded to say even that much. "I'm 'fraid we shall spoil that very pretty tea-party unless we sneak home another way; and I 'low two or three bullets in the gun would do no harm."

But their first movement was heard. The mastiff lifted his head, erected his mane, and with a hoarse growl sprang towards the lads. Katy was terribly frightened, but kept her presence of mind.

"Bismarck!" she commanded sternly, "keep quiet! come back here, sir!" and the great dog, growling and showing

his teeth, stopped his course, and slowly returned to his mistress.

"Boys," the girl called out, when she saw this, "go right along, and pay no attention to the dogs. When I see you safely near the house I'll come. Don't be alarmed for me."

"Come on, Tug," said Aleck; "the sister knows best."

Just before they reached the door they turned and saw her walking slowly towards them, the huge, lean father-mastiff close by her side, quiet and submissive, and the mother of the wild crew following tamely in his footsteps; while the whelp, that had never known, as the older dogs had, what it was to have a human master, straggled along behind, apparently in great doubt whether his respected parents had not lost their senses.

Tug hastily entered the house, and quickly appeared at the window with his gun at his shoulder, ready to shoot if the mastiff showed any signs of treachery; but he did nothing of the sort. Forty yards or so from the house, however, he declined to go any farther, and Katy, without once looking round, walked steadily on to the door, where her brother caught her in his arms, almost at the point of fainting, for the strain upon her nerves had nearly exhausted her strength.

CHAPTER XXXI.

ABANDONING THE ISLAND.

AFTER luncheon the three boys went over to inspect their old boat, and came back towards evening, bringing the oars, some straps of iron that had guarded her keel, the dragropes, and one or two other things. They had succeeded in pulling the boat ashore, but she had been too badly damaged to be of any further use to them.

Three days were now occupied busily in shooting, fishing, and putting runners on the scow. These runners were simply strips of board (which they had taken from the house) about four inches wide and fourteen feet long—the length of the boat's bottom. With the iron from the sled runners and from their own boat they shod these boat runners rudely, and strengthened the frame.

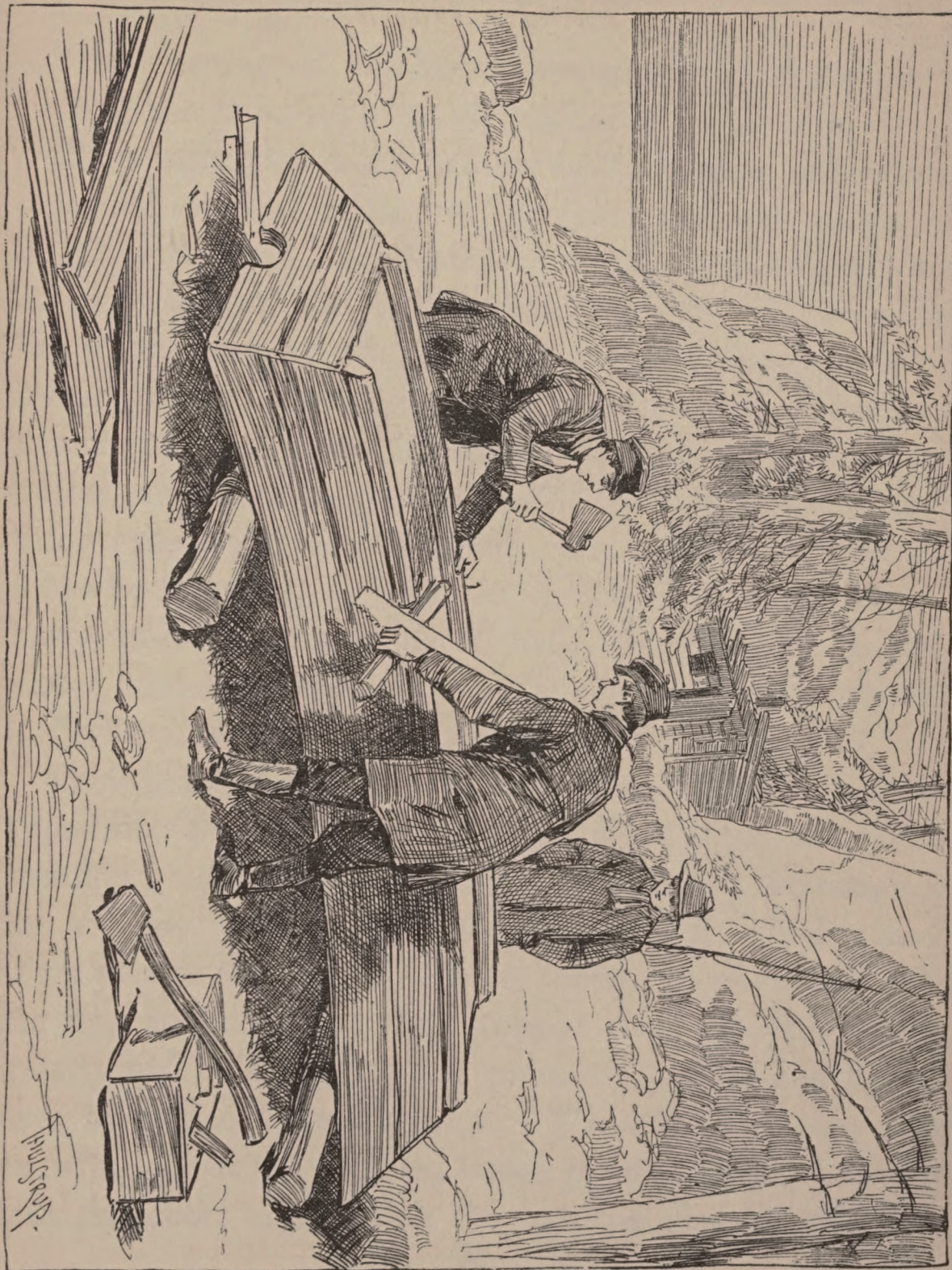
During this time the dogs had been almost always within sight, and their near approach during the night would frequently awaken the sleepers in the cabin, Rex quickest, of course. Katy was sure that if the animals could have been fed they would speedily have become docile; and when Tug proposed to shoot them for food, everybody resisted,

at least, until they should be in a worse strait than now. Nevertheless it was probably fortunate for the mastiff family that it kept out of gun-range.

The next and last day of their stay on the island was very cold, and a heavy wind brought hosts of birds, so that they captured twenty snow-flakes, and shot over thirty cross-bills, red-polls, and other small fry, which were placed on the roof as fast as obtained, where they froze solid, and thus kept fresh. This made Katy the most happy of all, for she alone knew that everything was gone except about two messes of coffee and one potful of corn-meal mush.

“Now, if only we could catch a big fish, we should be fixed grandly,” said Jim, as he went out to look at and bring home the lines. When he came back, however, he wore the long face and empty hands of disappointment, but left one line in hope of taking something during the night.

At sunset the gale went down, the stars glistened like gems, and the frost showed no signs of ceasing. By the light of a great fire of drift-wood on the beach the little scow was partly loaded, and then all hands went for the last time to their mattresses of hemlock boughs. What was ahead they had little notion, but they were now used to peril, and eager to begin their journey, not only because each one felt that he could scarcely be worse off, but from the excitement of commencing new adventures.



The morning of departure dawned clear and cold, continuing the promises of good weather.

Jim's early visit to his set-line next morning yielded him one small pickerel, while the traps gave a solitary snow-bird. These, with some other feathered mites, Katy cooked, while Aleck and Tug finished the packing. It was not a bad breakfast, you may think, for shipwrecked persons, but try it once for yourself—fish fried in bacon grease, some fragments of stewed snow-bird, and weak coffee. No bread, no butter, no potatoes, no green relish, no hot cakes, no anything except pickerel and weak coffee. But they thought it the best meal they had had on the island; and after a hasty washing and stowing of dishes they buckled on their skates, took their familiar places at the drag-ropes, and with a cheer started southward, steering by the compass.

Their old enemies came dashing down the hillside as the expedition took up its march, and stood upon the beach, seeming greatly astonished at the departure of the people at the cottage. Rex barked an angry farewell, which caused them to race out upon the ice as though to punish him for his impertinence; but they stopped short of bullet-range, greatly to Tug's disgust, and presently turned and trotted back to resume their wild career. When last seen they were prowling about the deserted house, trying to push their way into the door, or to break through the glass of the little

window. I have no doubt they succeeded; and I hope that they managed to exist until the fishermen came the next summer and took them off, for, after all, these dogs knew no different way of acting, and therefore could not be blamed for their savagery, even though it was needful that our heroes should guard against it.

The ice was in good condition, and the skaters made fair progress, so that by noon the dusky line of the mainland was plainly visible ahead.

At last Jim called out that he couldn't skate another stroke, and threw himself down, utterly "done for." Aleck ordered a halt at once, and began to build a small fire—for fuel had not been forgotten. Nobody understood how fatigued they had become by the unwonted exercise in their weak condition, until they found that an hour's halt seemed of little account, and decided to make it two. After that they went on slowly and lamely until near sundown, by which time the island had almost disappeared, and the mainland was growing distinct. Then they camped, stewing snow-birds for supper, and making a big corn-meal cake, which they baked in the skillet. Immediately afterwards beds were made up on the cargo, underneath the canvas, and each one slept as well as he could.

The next day several hummocks stood in the way, and just about noon they came to a channel of open water about

a mile wide. It was not rough, and they slid their boat over the edge of the ice into the water without any difficulty.

"If we had only known enough to have made us a good boat of this shape before starting, we should have got along much better," Aleck told them, and they all agreed with him, talking it over while they picked a few lean, and very cool bird-bones for luncheon before beginning the ferriage.

The load sank the weak scow so deeply that the water ran into cracks in her side, despite their calking; and as they were afraid to embark the whole expedition, two trips were made. This was slow and freezing work; and when finally all had got across, and had skated on about a mile, everybody was so cold and tired and sore that a camp was made under the shelter of a tall hummock. Aleck comforted the pride of the younger ones, who worried over their exhaustion, by telling them it was because they were so nearly starved; but this was poor consolation, they thought, so long as there seemed no chance for any increase in their supplies, or means of regaining their strength.

"Now," he remarked, "see what we have for supper to-night—two snow-birds and a small piece of corn-bread apiece. That would not make a full meal for one of us. If any accident prevents our getting ashore to-morrow I don't know what we shall do, for we have only enough food for breakfast, and a 'powerful weak' one at that!"

"That's hardest on me," said Tug, "for breakfast is my strong point. If I can have only one meal a day, I want to take it in the morning."

"That'll be your fix to-morrow, I guess," was the gloomy rejoinder.

The next day's run was a slow one, for the ice was bad in many places, and several hummocks had to be explored to find passable crossing-places. They could sight islands off at their left, but the nearest was several miles away; and though they knew they belonged to the Put-in-Bay group, they did not think it would pay to swerve from their course so long as the ice permitted them to advance towards the mainland. So they kept on, and the shore came nearer and nearer, until they could see that they were entering a great "bight," and that one mass of land, three or four miles towards the left, which they had taken for an island, was really a headland; so they shaped their course for it.

Near the beach stood a little house surrounded by small fields and hemmed in by the leafless woods. Towards this cottage they made their way, and its owner evidently saw them coming, for a grizzled old man, helping himself with a cane, hobbled down to meet them as they approached the beach.

CHAPTER XXXII.

AN ASTONISHED FARMER.

“WALL, I swanny!” was the farmer’s exclamation, as he stared at the strange-looking outfit invading his shores. “Who be ye? and where did ye come from?”

They began to tell him, and at every sentence his “Wall, I swanny!” was thrown in, to show the astonishment with which he listened. At last he seemed to recollect himself.

“Ye mus’ be drea’ful tired—nigh about beat out—and cold, too. Come into the haouse and git suthin’ to eat. There ain’t nobody to hum, but I guess I can find ye suthin’.”

Something! Why, my dear reader, they found, in the buttery and milk-room and cellar of that little house on the shore, a dinner the like of which, for goodness, they believed never was equalled. They ate and ate, laughing and almost crying by turns over their good fortune, the happiness of feeling safe and warm again taking off their hearts a load, whose weight they had not appreciated until it was removed. Meanwhile the old gentleman gossiped on in a pleasant strain.

"My wife," he told them, "has gone down to the Port to see da'ter an' her husband, for a day or two. My son, he runs on the Lake Shore Railroad in the winter, and so I'm alone. They wanted me to go down to the Port, too, but I don't think any great things of the feller Samanthy married, and I told mother I 'lowed I'd be more comf'able stayin' home 'long with the cow and the chickens."

"What is this Port you speak of, sir?" Aleck asked him.

"What? Why, Port Linton, to be sure—don't ye know where that is? Oh, I forgot, ye're lost, ain't ye. He! he! Wall, Port Linton is a town on the railroad, and also on the shore, to the west'ard o' here, or, leastways, to the suthard, 'cause we're out on a pint here, and the Port is up at the head of the bay, behind the big ma'sh. Ye could see it if 'twan't for them big sycamores. 'S about five mile 'cross the water."

"Can you let us stay with you to-night, and to-morrow we'll go on to the Port?"

"Oh, yes, ye can stay, an' welcome. If mother was home I'd hitch up and take ye in, but I ain't got no horse to-day, so I s'pose that's the best thing ye can do. But you'll have to double up some, 'cause I ain't got four beds."

Their rich supper and deep sleep and full breakfast made

“ ‘WA’AL, I DECLARE!’ ”



a new crew of them, and next morning they were eager to get on. It seemed as though ages had passed since they had been in civilization, and Tug began to wonder whether he would recognize a railway car when he saw it. When they were ready to go, Aleck heartily thanked the kind old farmer for his hospitality, and asked how much he should pay him for their entertainment.

"Oh, I don't want nothin'—nothin' at all," he said. "You're what they might call mariners in distress, and I just helped you as well as I could. I ain't done nothin', an' I don't want no money."

"Oh, but we have eaten so much, and made you so much trouble. I shall not feel right unless you let us pay you."

"Wall, if you're so earnest about it, I 'low a dollar would be about right. I reckon ye didn't hurt me mor'n about that's worth."

Surely this was small enough, but the farmer was entirely satisfied, and said he was sorry to say good-bye.

They had swung along over the ice in good style after leaving the farmer's cottage, and the buildings and ice-bound shipping of the village, which in summer was a busy port, but in winter was sleepy enough, were now in plain view.

There was to be the end of their troubles so far as the

present scrape was concerned, but they were not a great deal nearer Cleveland than when they started ; and their minds, relieved of present anxieties, began to be crowded with thoughts of the future, and how they were going to accomplish their purpose any better now than before they had started.

They were to be aided, in this respect, in a way they had not suspected, however, and the help was now approaching in the shape of a skater who came on towards them with swift, strong strides.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE "TIMES" CORRESPONDENT.

As this skater approached, they could see that he was a tall young man, wearing cap and gloves of sealskin, and a fur-trimmed overcoat. He had skates of the newest patent, and, altogether, seemed to be what Tug pronounced him under his breath, "a swell."

He slackened his pace as he came up, and then, seeing the boat they were dragging, and the queer appearance of the whole outfit, stopped short, raising his hat to Katy.

"What kind of an expedition is this, pray tell?" he said pleasantly, but with his face full of curiosity.

"I'm 'fraid we ain't any too scrumptious," Tug replied, off-hand, "but you could hardly expect it, I s'pose, seein' we've been a month or more on the ice."

"A month on the ice! How? Where?"

So they told him, each one talking a little, but making a short story of it. He did not interrupt by any "I swannys!" as the old farmer had, but kept his eyes—Katy thought they were the sharpest eyes she had ever seen—upon each speaker's face, as if committing every word to memory.

"That's a mighty good story," he said. "What are you going to do now?"

"We shall go on to my uncle's in Cleveland right away, that is, if we have money enough to take us there."

"I suppose you wouldn't object to earning a little more money, then?" the stranger remarked, interrogatively.

"Nothing would suit Tug and me better," Aleck rejoined. "Do you know how we can do it? My name is Aleck Kincaid, and this promising youth here is Thucydides, otherwise 'Tug,' Montgomery. This is my sister Katy, and the youngster is my brother Jim."

"I am Harry Porter," the young man announced, shaking hands with them all, "and I am glad to get acquainted with you. Now, sit down a minute, and I'll make you a proposition. I live in New York city, and am on the staff of *The Times*, but am out here for a few days on a visit to my father. Your adventures would make a capital story—what we call a 'sensation'—in that newspaper. Do you think you could write it out in good shape?"

"I'm afraid not, sir," Aleck said. "I've never felt that I had any faculty in that direction—but I could make you an automatic brass valve if you wanted it!"

"Could you? That's more than I could do. Well, now, you see, you have the facts, but you must make use of my training to put them into readable shape, so that the story

will be worth money to some newspaper. I can see how two or three very good articles, indeed, can be made, and what I propose is this: you come to a boarding-house, kept by a friend of mine, in Port Linton, and stay there as long as is necessary to tell me everything. Then I can write it all into a connected story, and we'll divide the profits."

"But supposing *The Times* shouldn't want to print it?"

"I'll take care of that," Mr. Porter replied.

"But we would have to wait a good while to get the money back, wouldn't we?" Aleck asked. "And we want it now worse than we ever shall again, probably."

"Ye—es, that's a difficulty," Mr. Porter admitted, slowly. Then he thought over it a minute or two in silence. "I'll tell you what I'll do," he said at last, "and I think I shall be safe. I estimate that you can give me facts enough for ten or twelve columns—say ten; and that for this 'special and exclusive' they will pay me twenty dollars, or more, a column. So if you are willing to take one hundred dollars for your information, I'll run the risk of getting that back and another hundred on top of it for the labor of writing."

"I am sure that we shall be very glad to do it if you think you are not cheating yourself."

"That's *my* lookout," said the newspaper man. "And, now, Miss Kincaid, if you will take a seat in the boat, I think we should all regard it as a pleasure to draw you

the rest of the way, for I mean to bear a hand at dragging."

Katy demurred, but all the boys insisted, so she unstrapped her skates, nestled warmly into the boat, where Mr. Porter folded his fur-trimmed coat about her, saying he should be too warm with skating to wear it, and they set off gayly.

The plan thus made upon the ice was fully carried out, beginning that very evening, which was Friday; and on Tuesday morning Mr. Porter gave Tug twenty-five dollars and Aleck seventy-five—the latter "for the family," as he said. Besides this, they sold their scow for fifteen dollars, feeling that they had a right to do so, since, if the fishermen who had left it on the island (the name and position of which they learned) should ever return for it, they would find left in its place the *Red Erik*.

The goods that they cared to keep were packed and sent on to Cleveland by freight. At nine o'clock on Tuesday morning, therefore, the four adventurers—yes, *five*, for Rex was not forgotten—feeling themselves already famous in New York, and hence around the whole world, took the train for Cleveland, and reached their uncle's house in time for his one-o'clock dinner. All were heartily welcomed, and told their adventures again and again—in fact, until they became so thoroughly tired of being "trotted out" that Tug one day declared that he almost wished he had never left the island.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A HAPPY CONCLUSION.

ALL the members of our party, to whose courage and independence of mind my story has borne witness, immediately and anxiously exerted themselves to relieve their hospitable relative of the burden of their support, and it was not long before they succeeded.

Aleck and Tug found profitable work to do. Katy was eager to resume her studies, and therefore gladly accepted an invitation to stay with her aunt and help her in her sewing before and after school-hours. Jim roomed with his brother, and went to school also, acting morning and evening as an office-boy for a lawyer to whom Mr. Porter had given him a letter of introduction.

To prepare themselves for these different stations used up their stock of money, but by close economy they came through without any debt—yes, even with some money left—just nineteen cents among them all! To this Tug's pocket contributed nothing, but he was happy. "There's one great comfort in being 'dead broke,'" he told them. "You know precisely where you are, and that matters

can get no worse. You are ready to begin all new again."

This sense of beginning anew was a tonic that strengthened the hearts of all of them; for each one knew that, although he had no money, his feet were planted firmly on the first round of the ladder which, if steadily climbed, might lead to prosperity.

With this satisfactory state of things the story might end, but twenty years and more have passed since that hard winter which made their journey to the island and escape from it possible; twenty years, in which no such hard winter has been seen again. Aleck is manager and part owner of a manufactory of gas-fixtures and brass fittings in Pittsburgh, and Jim is his cashier. Tug lives in Cleveland, where he is busy, as an inventor, and expects some day to be made rich by his improvements in railway-brakes and in oil-pumping machinery; but nobody addresses him as "Tug" except his wife (whom *he* calls Katy) and his little boy, who never tires of hearing how papa and mamma and Uncle Aleck went adrift on an ice-floe in Lake Erie.

THE END.

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
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